

THE JAMES BOYS WEEKLY.

Containing Stories of Adventure.

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NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 14, 1902.

Price 5 Cents.

THE JAMES BOYS' BONANZA;

OR,

CARL GREENE'S HARD LUCK.

BY D.W. STEVENS.



The trap-door shot up violently. Carl Greene went with it. He was hurled with great force against the chair on which he had been sitting. The chair rolled over. It smashed the lamp. Then all was total darkness.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES FOUR GUESTS AT AN INN.

Notwithstanding the fact that it was the middle of summer, it would have been quite impossible to imagine a more stormy night than the one when this story opens.

The rain fell in torrents, and the crashing of the thunder in the heavens was like the roar of artillery.

The gloom was profound, save when a flash of lightning illuminated the scene.

It was undoubtedly a night when indoors was preferable to outside.

Evidently, judging from their remarks, several men seated in a low, dark room thought so.

The apartment in which they found themselves was part of an inn, which stood on the outskirts of the town of Chadwick, in Missouri.

The only light in it was that afforded by a lamp which hung from the ceiling of the room.

But safe from the storm, the men in the room never objected to their shelter on the ground that there was not sufficient light.

There were five men in the room.

One of them was the landlord.

He was sitting apart from the others in a half sleepy condition, from which he was only roused when an order was given to him.

Occasionally he had to replenish the whisky bottles, for the four men who were his guests on this occasion had a great thirst on them.

They were seated in pairs at two small tables and took no notice of each other.

As a matter of fact they were not acquainted.

Not one of the four men had a prepossessing appearance.

Two of the men looked like desperadoes. The other two seemed to be tramps with a considerable air of the crook about each of them.

Their clothes were ragged and worn, and a beard of about a week's growth which covered each man's chin, did not tend to enhance his beauty.

One man had red hair.

The other wore a black patch.

This was to conceal the fact that he had lost one of his eyes.

"Gosh, what a night!" said the red-headed man.

"Darned glad we reached this place, Si," answered the man with one eye, "our clothes ain't in first-rate condition, and thunder! this rain'd have washed 'em off our backs!"

"I think not," laughed the other, "but it would have washed us away with our clothes. Well, Hank, we're better off than our partner."

"Why?"

"Guess he'll come right through this rain."

"Not much! he'd wait till to-morrow."

"You're wrong: you don't know him as well as me: when he's got anything important on, he sticks to it. You can't turn him aside."

"And great Scott, this is important enough! It's the biggest thing we ever touched."

"By Heaven, yes; but you wouldn't think, to look at our gay attire, that in a few days we'll be worth thousands and thousands of dollars."

"Yet that's the size of it."

"You bet!"

The two men had been carrying on this talk in comparatively low tones.

From time to time they stopped to summon the landlord for more drinks.

They took not the slightest notice of the other two men in the room.

But they lowered the tone of their voices in speaking, recognizing that they were not alone.

The other two men had been, up to this time, extremely quiet.

They drank their whisky and looked at each other. Then they would swear at intervals in the most violent manner at the weather.

This is all they contributed to the noise in the room.

One of the strangers, a tall, broad-shouldered, black-whiskered man, had complained several times of feeling sleepy.

Now he threw himself forward with his head and arms on the table.

In a few minutes he seemed to be asleep—judging from the sound of his heavy breathing. His companion reached over and shook him two or three times.

But he might as well have shaken a piece of wood, so far as the effect it produced.

The sleeper went on sleeping.

Thereupon his companion rose with a growl of dissatisfaction.

He too was a big man, but had no beard, wearing a mustache only.

"Jesse, Jesse!" he said, stooping down and speaking into the ear of the sleeping man.

There was no response, not even when he shook his friend.

"Curse him!" muttered the other man, "this darned whisky's settled him."

He walked over to where the innkeeper was dozing.

"Landlord! landlord!" he said, hastily.

"Eh?" shouted the man, suddenly awakened and springing up, "what is et, mister?"

"See my friend?"

"Over thar?"

"Yes. He's asleep. Guess a gun wouldn't wake him up now your whisky's got its work in on him. Now look here."

"I'm listen'."

"If my friend wakes he'll ask for me."

"Et's likely."

"Very well, tell him I'm gone in the barn to see how the horses are getting on. There are times," said the desperado in a loud voice, "when I prefer the society of horses to that of men."

As he said these insolent words he looked at the tramps. But prudence kept them quiet.

Then, passing them, he opened the door and walked out into the rain.

The landlord settled back into the slumber from which he had been wakened, and the two tramps resumed their talk.

"He's a terror, Si, and no mistake. By gosh! he made me that mad I could have drawn a bead on him."

"Darned good thing for you you didn't, Hank. He'd have made cold meat of you in no time. I saw him watching us both. He was just spoiling for a fight."

"Well, curse him, let him go! There's one consolation, his pal's fast asleep, so we can talk as loud as we please now."

"Sure, till the other man comes back: so we feel certain that he'll come along, although it's mighty wet."

"I tell you," replied the other, in rather irritable tones, "that nothing will stop him. The stage may be blown away, but he'll stick to it if it is."

"Why in thunder didn't he take the railroad beats me. There's a station at Ozark."

"That's so, but he'd got an idea in his head that someone was on the lookout for him, and he reckoned it'd be on the cars that they'd keep their eyes."

"Well, so long's he gets here it doesn't much matter how he comes."

"It's a wonderful business."

"Gosh! yes, it's the biggest thing we've ever been in and we'll get it through safe enough now. We were never meant for crooks, Si."

"Why?" asked the red-headed man.

"Be-cause we're so mighty curious to look at, and it's darned hard work to conceal our weak points. There's you with that red head of yours shining like a danger signal."

"And you," laughed the other, "with one eye looking like a dark lantern."

"And our partner on the stage with that piece out of the end of his nose. By gosh, we're great."

The door of the inn was opened.

The tall stranger entered.

His doing so roused the man who had been sleeping with his head on the table.

He looked up hurriedly.

"Where've you been, Jim?"

"Out to look at the horses."

"What's the time?"

"Almost nine o'clock."

"What!" exclaimed the black-bearded stranger, with an air of intense surprise, at the same time springing to his feet.

"That's the right time, mister," put in the landlord, who was also awake.

"Then I'll just have one more drink to keep the weather out, then I'll go."

"Go!" shouted the innkeeper. "Yer jokin'! Why, you'd better stay right hyar till the storm breaks. It'll break by midnight."

"Can't wait. You don't suppose I'm going out into this rain in order to enjoy it, do you?"

"Well, not exactly."

"You bet not! I've got to be many miles from here by ten o'clock, and I'll have to keep my promise. Come on, Jim!"

The two men tossed off a heavy drink of whisky each.

Then going round to the barn, they led out their horses.

Springing into the saddles, they touched the animals with the spurs, making them bound off madly.

CHAPTER II.

THE BANDIT'S CAMP—JESSE JAMES' STORY.

The rain was still descending in sheets.

The thunder and lightning continued without cessation.

The wind, which had become almost cyclonic, howled furiously.

It was as much as the two horses could do to get along.

The road they were traversing was dark as pitch, and only the unerring instinct of the horses kept them right.

At length they left the road and traveled across a prairie.

But even now the horses found their way across the trackless ground.

Suddenly the leading rider stopped dead. He drew his horse right back on his haunches, so quickly did he rein him in.

"We must be close at hand," said the black-bearded man.

"You bet."

"From the pocket of the heavy coat he was wearing, the black-bearded man drew a dark lantern.

He exposed the light, and thrice he waved the lantern slowly through the air.

In a few minutes at a considerable height, a red light gleamed.

"They've seen us," cried one of the two men. "Let's ride forward!"

Slowly the two men went along.

Then they stopped, for they heard steps approaching.

"That you, Jesse?"

"Yes; it's Ed."

"Right. Here's the bridge; you'll have to feel your way across."

"Show the light, then we'll know where we are."

"Sure."

Across a narrow bridge rode the two horsemen.

"You'd better dismount, boys," cried the man who had displayed the red lantern, "if you lead the horses we'll get along quicker, I reckon."

In this way the three men proceeded up a rocky path for some little time.

Then, arrived at the top, they found themselves on a rocky ledge forming a platform.

A huge rock jutted out, dimly showing itself in the darkness.

Passing round this rock all was changed as if by magic.

There was no darkness, no storm.

All was light.

A huge fire blazed in the center of a spacious cavern, the flames rising high in the air and illuminating the scene.

Round this fire were grouped several men.

They were all as determined looking as the two horsemen whose acquaintance we made at the inn.

"Hulloa, Jesse! Hulloa, Jim!" shouted one of the men by the fire. "You must be wet."

"Wet!" said the black-bearded man, angrily. "By Heaven, boys, I believe the rain'll run out of me for a week!"

The speaker was Jesse James, the bandit king of America.

The man who had been riding with him was his friend, Jim Cummins.

The cavern was the present home of the James Boys, and the men seated round the fire were members of the band.

It is not necessary to discuss these men minutely.

Their deeds had gained for them world-wide notoriety. Besides, the incidents narrated in these pages will better serve to impress their characteristics on the reader.

Any other man but Jesse James would have felt seriously incommoded by the drenched condition in which he found himself.

But after taking a long pull at a bottle of whisky the bandit king settled himself by the fire, the heat of which soon began to make him steam.

Jim Cummins sat near him.

"I guess, boys," said the latter, "you think we're a bit crazy riding through all this weather."

"Well," said Frank James, "I'm dead sure I didn't expect you till morning."

"And if Jesse had listened to me," added Jim Cummins, "we should have stayed where we were. By gosh! first of all, he went to sleep."

"Sleep!" shouted Ed Kelly. "That's not much in Jesse's line."

"Yes, he went fast to sleep, boys; then he woke up and shouted out that he must go."

The bandit king positively roared with laughter.

The remarks of Jim Cummins amused him highly.

"So you thought I was asleep, Jim? That's good. For if I deceived you I must surely have deceived the others."

"You were not asleep, Jesse!" said Jim Cummins, incredulously.

"Not any more than you were, Jim. I'll tell you the whole story, boys. There were two fellows in the room sitting at a table near where we were."

"Did you know them?"

"No, Bob. They looked like a couple of tramps. Anyway, something they said caused me to think a bit."

"I wasn't listening to them."

"Guess not, Jim, but you don't find me let things go by. Well, one of these cusses in rags said: 'We don't look as if we'd have thousands and thousands of dollars in a few days, do we?' 'By gosh!' I thought to myself, 'you look as if a dime would buy you both.'"

"Go on, Jesse!"

"Give me time to light my pipe, boys."

"Now," added the bandit king, "it seemed a strange thing for this man to say, didn't it?"

"You bet it was."

"Well, I thought, 'I'd like to hear all you've got to say.' They were speaking mighty quiet, and I only caught a word here and there. Now, Jim, as you saw, I pretended to fall asleep, for I wanted them to fancy they were alone and could talk freely."

"But how could they? How did you know I'd leave the room?"

"It was lucky you did, but I'd have given you a pointer to make you go if you hadn't. As soon as Jim had gone out to the barn the two cusses began to talk right out. I heard every word they said."

"Was it interesting?"

"Very. Listen."

"No need to say that," replied Frank James, "what you've said has excited us."

"Well, boys, those two men have a friend, and the friend has the treasure."

"That's all very well, Jesse," said Bob Ford, "but how're we going to find this friend?"

"If you'd have a little patience, Bob, and wouldn't interrupt I guess you'd know all about it."

"Go on, I won't say another word."

"This friend is traveling by the stage from Ozark to Chadwick."

"When?"

"To-night."

"He'll be blown away," shouted one bandit.

"He's not a jay," cried another. "Guess he won't come."

"He will come," said Jesse, firmly, "for these two men talked it over and had no doubt on the point."

"Why in thunder," put in Frank James, "doesn't he go by train?"

"Be-cause he's afraid he's being looked for on the cars."

"Then he's committed a crime."

"I reckon the treasure he's got with him he's stolen," said the bandit king, "but that doesn't matter to us. The money's just as good."

"Rather."
 "How do we know him, Jesse?"
 "I've got his description, Ed. I don't know his height or the color of his hair, but I do know one thing, and that ought to point him out. He's got a piece out of the tip of his nose."
 "Great Scott! that makes it a cinch!"
 "Sure!"
 "Where does this stage travel?"
 "Along the valley, Ed."
 "And you intend to hold it up, Jesse?"
 "Of course; what d'you think made us come back here through this rain?"
 "Say, Jesse."
 "Well?"
 "We'll be too late."
 "Why?"
 "It's nearly eleven now."
 "We've got lots of time. It'll be half-past twelve by the time the stage passes, and we can ride there in less than an hour."
 "D'you know what stuff the fellow has?"
 "No, but I reckon it's bills. Anyway we'll seize him, then we'll soon scare him out of the valuables he carries."
 "It's a great scheme, and I fancy it'll put us in easy street for some time."

"No doubt of it."
 The bandits passed the whisky bottle round.
 Each man drank freely.
 The rain still continued to fall in torrents, and the spirit would serve to keep off the effects of the damp.
 Some little time was occupied in saddling the horses and preparing to leave the cave. Then when all was ready the bandit king led the way from the retreat down the steep path which went towards the bridge over which Jesse James and Jim Cummins had passed.
 Cautiously the men went down, leading their horses by the bridle.
 It was so dark that it was almost impossible to see that each of the bandits was wearing a heavy black mask.

CHAPTER III.

A WILD RIDE—ATTACK ON THE STAGE.

Whilst all these things were happening the stage was making its way along.
 Over the roads, down which torrents of water now ran, the heavy vehicle labored.
 Many times the driver thought it would be impossible for him to proceed, so great was the violence of the storm.
 The rain still fell heavily and the wind blew furiously.
 Every now and then a particularly vivid flash of lightning and a deafening peal of thunder startled the terrified horses.
 Mile after mile was traversed in this fashion.
 At length the road became absolutely impassable.
 The horses tried their utmost; the stage would not move.
 Handing the reins to one of the passengers, who despite the storm, had been sitting beside him, he jumped into the road.
 Going to the heads of the leaders, he tried to induce the animals to proceed.
 But his efforts were in vain.
 "Guess we've got to stay hyar now, gents," he shouted as he returned to the stage.
 "Can't you proceed?" said an elderly-looking, nervous man in black. "I'm very anxious to reach the town."
 "Thunder! So'm I. D'you think I'm staying here from choice?"
 "What's the cause of the delay?"
 "Reckon the road's so broke up the horses can't travel. We'll hev to stay till et gits light, then we'll be able to see what's the mischief."
 Clearly there was no help for it.
 The passengers submitted to the inevitable with the best grace possible.
 The stage had drawn up under the branches of some huge forest trees which grew alongside the road.
 The darkness underneath these trees was intense.
 But, at any rate, they served as some protection against the wind and rain.
 There were altogether six passengers, but they were so extremely sad and miserable that they had long since relapsed into silence.
 Even the stoppage of the stage did not rouse them.
 Leaving them in this dark spot, with a very good prospect of remaining there till morning, let us see what was happening to the bandits.

The masked men had ridden without cessation through the valley amid the awful storm. Jesse James led the way.
 He was mounted, as usual, upon Siroc, his magnificent black horse.
 Siroc was not scared by the storm, and the fearless manner which the gallant creature passed along stimulated the rest of the horses.
 Frank James, on his splendid brown horse, Jim Malone, was nearly far in the rear; so they went through the valley, not pausing a moment.
 Many times the rushing waters were up to the saddle girths, heedless of this the bandits dashed on.
 At length Jesse James halted.
 The other men followed his example.
 "This place'll do as well as any other, boys!" cried the bandit king.
 "Better," put in Bob Ford, "for we do get some shelter here."
 He was right.
 The rocks rose high above the road, and towards the top they arched out, so that the bandits were able to avoid the extremity of the violence of the storm by remaining underneath.
 The minutes passed and there was no sign of the stage.
 Not that the bandits expected to hear anything.
 They knew that the roar of the elements would drown all other sounds.
 But still, as time sped on, the bandits began to look at each other inquiringly.
 "What's the meauing of it?" asked Jim Cummins.
 "Guess Jesse's wrong after all."
 "How d'you mean, Bob?"
 "Why, my idea is that the stage never started at all. The driver had got a little sense left in his head and stayed at home."
 "Bet that's it," said Frank James.
 "We're a lot of jays, that's what we are!" cried Ed Kelly.
 "That's about the size of it," said Clell Miller.
 "You make me tired," shouted the bandit king, in a voice the tones of which were distinctly audible above the storm. "We'll soon settle the question."
 As the bandit king said this he sprang from the road into the saddle.
 "Why, where in thunder are you off?" cried Frank James.
 "I'm going to ride on the route of the stage, and I'll stick to it until I come to the town," replied the bandit king. "then we'll see who's right. I advise you to follow me," he added, sarcastically.
 With these words the bandit king dashed his spurs into Siroc's sides, and quick as lightning the animal set off along the road.
 The rest of the band were in their saddles very speedily, and the whole of the bandits rode through the darkness and storm, at a furious pace.
 Jesse was beginning to feel that he had made a mistake in assuming that the stage had started.
 For though they had traversed many miles there were no signs of the vehicle.
 The bandits had now arrived at the top of a hill.
 For a few yards they rode down it.
 Then they found the road in a terrible condition.
 The water rushing down the steep descent in a perfect torrent had carried rocks and huge masses of earth along with it.
 The bandit king halted.
 "Boys!"
 "Yes."
 "This won't do. It's impossible to ride any further."
 "It's out of the question, and we can't ride round either without going back a long way. If we were birds we might get up those rocks."
 "I'll go on down and see what the road's like. If it gets better we'll have to urge our horses over this broken part, for we must get on."
 The bandit king left Siroc standing in the road.
 There was never really any occasion to hitch up the splendid black.
 Then Jesse James made his way down the hill.
 It was still intensely dark.
 It was impossible to see more than a few yards ahead.
 But all at once the bandit king stopped.
 Then remaining silent, he listened long and anxiously.
 "Curse this weather!" he muttered savagely. "I'll swear I heard some horses moving a few minutes ago."
 Again the bandit king listened. Then he decided to make a move forward, for he could hear nothing.
 He stepped cautiously, but there was really little need for him to do so. The storm muffled the noise of his movements.
 Then gazing keenly through the darkness the bandit king made out dimly the outlines of the stage.

"I knew it," he said to himself, "I was sure I was right." Satisfied that at last he had located the stage, the bandit king hurried up the hill toward the spot where he had left his comrades. If it had been bright they would have seen a smile of triumph on his face.

"Well, Jesse, how about the road? Can we get along?"

"I did not take much notice, Frank," was the cool answer.

"Why, how in thunder's that?" shouted Frank James, in an irritated manner.

"I had something better to attend to."

"You don't say," replied Frank James, in a sarcastic manner.

"Yes, boys. I think in future you'll admit I know a thing or two when I tell you that the stage is down below at the bottom of this hill!"

"What!" shouted the bandits, in chorus.

"It's lucky the wind's blowing or they'd hear you," laughed Jesse, "for they're mighty near. let me tell you. I was quite right, boys; it's certain the stage has met with an accident, or else they're waiting for the storm to clear."

"We seem to be in luck after all. Let's hope it'll stay with us right through."

"Come along, boys—follow me!" cried the bandit king. "I'll show you the way! And don't make any noise. I want to give these people a complete surprise."

"Right!"

The bandits went on down the hill, keeping close to their leader.

Jesse James at length stopped.

"We're not many yards away," he whispered.

"Then we'll make a dash."

"Not yet, Frank."

"Why?"

"Because I want two or three of you to get in front of the stage so that there'll be no chance of anyone escaping in the darkness."

Bob Ford, Ed Kelly and Frank James went ahead.

They kept as near one side of the road as possible, so as to place some distance between themselves and the stage.

Then when they heard Jesse James and the men with him make a move, they did the same.

With their six-shooters in their hands, the whole party rushed towards the stage.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BANDITS AND THE TRAVELER BY THE STAGE.

Even the storm did not drown the noise made by the bandits as they ran forward.

Two of the passengers sprang to their feet.

Each of them had drawn his revolver.

But to fire would have been madness.

It would have provoked the bandits into extreme measures.

For now the stage was completely surrounded.

"Hands up!" shouted the bandit king in stentorian tones.

At the same time a crowd of bandits covered every one of the passengers.

The driver was included, for he was amongst them, having taken shelter in the stage.

The order was instantly complied with.

No one thought of attempting to make the slightest resistance.

With the exception of the two passengers who had drawn their six-shooters, the others were completely cowed.

Then the bandit king took a lantern out of the heavy coat he was wearing. He turned on the light.

By its glare he began very carefully to inspect the faces of the passengers.

Four of them he dismissed in a moment.

There was nothing in either that required examination.

The fifth man he submitted to a more severe scrutiny, finally saying:

"Guess you're not the man I'm after, though, Great Scott! you're homely enough for him."

"Much 'bliged, mister," said the man, with a laugh, "but the girls think I'm durned handsome."

As he sank back in his seat the bandit king favored him with another look.

He appeared to be a farmer from his dress, manner and speech.

He had a heavy brown beard and mustache, and thick hair of the same color.

But he was by no means striking in his aspect.

"The fool's pleased with himself," muttered Jesse James.

Then he turned his attention on the last man of the party.

The light flashed on the man's face.

The bandit king started.

Keenly he looked at the traveler.

"I've got him, boys!" he shouted.

For the bandit king saw plainly that the man had lost a piece of flesh at the end of his nose.

It was evidently the result of an accident, but it furnished an indelible identification mark.

The bandits crowded forward when they heard the words of the bandit king.

For each man was anxious to have a look at the stranger.

Meanwhile, with pallid face, the traveler was staring hard at the bandit king, trying hard to maintain his composure.

"We'd better not waste any time!" cried Jim Cummins.

This remark roused Jesse.

"You're quite right, Jim," he said, "and I think it'll be well if one of you boys'll go through him."

"Through me, mister!" laughed the traveler, who by this time had recovered from his surprise. "Guess you won't get much for yer trouble."

"We're the best judges of that," said the bandit king.

Ed Kelly sprang on to the stage.

"No, let him get down into the road!" cried Jesse James.

The bandits compelled the passenger to descend.

It was no longer raining.

The weather had changed with startling abruptness.

For now the sky was clear, except for a few clouds which were scurrying along.

And the moon, having risen in the heavens, was shining brightly.

Ed Kelly was not long in performing his task.

He had had considerable practice at the work.

But when he'd finished he had accomplished nothing.

"Not a red cent, Jesse."

The bandit king was amazed.

From the talk he had overheard he concluded that he would capture a large booty.

To find absolutely nothing was extraordinary.

But Jesse James' surprise soon changed to anger.

"Mister!" he said, as he bent forward and looked at the traveler with eyes that shot fire through the holes in the mask he was wearing.

"Did you speak to me?"

"By Heaven! yes," thundered Jesse James. "Don't think to fool me. I know that you've got a pile of stuff somewhere."

"You know more than I do."

"Turn out all the packages and trunks in the stage and go through them. It's quite possible that one of them may belong to this cuss here."

"Snakes! We must have been a lot of jays to have forgotten that!"

The bandits went to work quickly.

In a few minutes they had forced open all the packages, grips and trunks on the stage.

But beyond a few bills in one of the grips they saw nothing of value.

Once more the bandit king seemed beaten.

All this time the brown-bearded farmer was a most observant spectator of the proceedings.

Then Jesse reverted to his former plan.

He again placed his pistol so near the head of the traveler as to touch his temple.

In determined tones he spoke.

"Make your will, my friend. I'm not deceived by what's gone on. I know you've got the stuff somewhere."

It seemed now as if nothing could save the man from death.

Jesse James seemed bent on killing him.

Then Frank James walked forward.

He touched the arm of the bandit king, causing him to look around.

"Jesse!"

"Well?"

"I think you are making a mistake."

"Indeed!"

The talk between the two men was being carried on in tones so low that Jesse James' intended victim was unable to hear what was being said.

Bob Ford had come over and joined the two brothers.

"What're you two chinning about?"

"Frank's got tender-hearted all at once," laughed Jesse James.

"How's that?"

"He thinks this cuss ought not to be shot."

"You don't say! Why?"

"Because," said Frank James, "if he knows anything, he won't be able to help much with an ounce of lead in his skull. Dead men don't make good witnesses."

"What you've said is true enough, Frank," remarked Bob Ford, "but I don't see what else can be done. Shall we let the stage go and take this cuss along with it? How'll that suit?"

"Not at all."

"You're hard to please."

"I'm not. Instead of staying here, I'd say let's get away at once."

For a moment or two the bandit king gazed at the traveler.

Then he lowered his pistol.

"Frank's right!" he shouted. "We'll clear away from here, boys, and take him along with us."

Only Frank James and Bob Ford knew why the bandit king was acting in this manner.

But they had unbounded confidence in their leader.

"Yes, we'll get," added the bandit king, "and I don't fancy these gentlemen will be sorry to see the last of us."

The traveler was standing in the road.

Ed Kelly seized him by one arm, Wood Hite grasped the other.

"He can't get away now, Jesse!" cried Ed Kelly.

"Bring him along, boys!"

"Where?"

"Back to the horses. We'll get on them and ride home."

"Right!"

The bandits, with their prisoner, hurried back to the top of the hill, where their horses were waiting for them.

"Put the cuss on one of the horses," cried the bandit king.

"Guess he isn't very heavy."

Ed Kelly took charge of the prisoner.

He made the man ride before him.

In this manner the bandits started for the cave which was their present hiding-place.

They rode as fast as they could, for it was beginning to get light, and they were anxious to avoid being seen.

When the stage again started on its way, it carried two passengers less than it had started with.

For the brown-bearded farmer had departed unnoticed.

CHAPTER V.

THE BANDITS FIND A BLANK PIECE OF PAPER.

It was apparent to Jesse James that it would be daybreak before the bandits could return to the cave.

So he called a halt.

"Boys!" he said.

"Yes," replied Frank James, "what is it?"

"I reckon we don't want this cuss to be seen, do we?"

"Not on your life!"

"Well, it'll be light in a few minutes, and then it'll be very risky work riding round here."

"What's to be done? It's quite true what you say, Jesse."

"I guess we'd better take shelter in the forest. We're on the edge of it now!" cried Ed Kelly.

"That'll do very well," remarked the bandit king, "and we'll stay there until it gets dark. There's big money in this business yet, and I want to be careful."

Eventually the bandits came to a clearing amid the trees where the ground was hollowed out.

They decided instantly to go no farther.

"We're as safe here, boys," cried the bandit king, "as if we'd gone a hundred miles away."

Notwithstanding the terrific downpour that had taken place, the dense foliage of the trees and bushes in this spot had kept off the rain.

The consequence was that in a short time the bandits found themselves sitting round a roaring fire, the flames of which shot up until they nearly reached the branches overhead.

"Now to business," cried the bandit king.

"What kind?"

"Great Scott! Jim, there's only one thing to do. What in thunder d'you think we brought this cuss along for? Bring him over."

The prisoner was standing a few yards away with two of the bandits at his side.

No thought of escape filled his mind.

He was unarmed, for the bandits had taken his weapons away.

The man knew that he would be shot down by a dozen pistols before he had run ten yards.

"Stand there!" cried Jesse James.

The bandit king, in common with the others, had removed the mask from his face.

Under the glare of the flames he looked quite fiendish.

He had taken a seat on the stump of a tree, and smoking a pipe, he prepared to question his prisoner.

Sternly Jesse James looked at the captive. At length he spoke.

"Before we go any further," said the bandit king, "I reckon it

would be as well if I let you know who we are. D'you hear?"

"Yes," said the prisoner, firmly.

"Then listen!"

"Go on!"

"I am Jesse James; these men and myself are known as the James Boys."

With a savage look the bandit king uttered these words, keeping his eyes fixed on the captive. He was anxious to note what impression they made.

Apparently the man heard the announcement unmoved.

The bandit king paused a minute.

Then he resumed his talk.

"Two friends of yours were with me last night. Shall I describe them?"

"It don't matter to me. You can if you like."

"Ah! but it does matter," laughed the bandit king, decisively.

"Well, they weren't exactly beauties, these two. One of them had the finest crop of red hair I ever put my eyes on. The other had only one eye."

Notwithstanding all his composure the prisoner was not able to control himself completely at this announcement.

His face exhibited some of the surprise that he felt.

But he did not say a word.

"So that wakes you up, does it," laughed the bandit king; "you see now that I know a bit. Now, mister, I'm not going to waste any time on you. I ask you once more have you got that money?"

"No."

"Take care," replied the bandit king, raising his six-shooter and pointing it at the man.

"Stop!" shouted Wood Hite.

The bandit king was in the very act of firing.

"You spoke just in time, Wood. What's your game?"

"Why, we're going to stay here all day, Jesse, aren't we?"

"Yes."

"Then we may as well go slow. If we've got to kill this chap let's get some amusement out of him."

"That's great, Wood!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the bandits.

The remarks of Wood Hite had appealed to the brutish instincts of these men. They saw fine sport ahead.

"Do what you like, boys!" laughed the bandit king. "It doesn't matter a red to me how he dies."

"Guess we'll hang him."

"Too quick."

"Well, burn him."

"Don't like that."

"Let's roast him over the fire," remarked one of the bandits, in about the same tone he would have used in speaking of a piece of meat.

"I've got it, boys," cried the bandit king, laughingly. "We'll strip him and draw a circle on him. That'll be the target, then we'll tie him up to the tree and shoot. The man who fires nearest the center'll have to draw five dollars from each."

"Gosh, you're a genius, Jesse!"

The bandits roused themselves from the sleepy state in which they had been, owing to the fatigue of the night.

They expected to extract considerable amusement from the stranger who was in their power.

Two of the bandits seized the man in their arms.

Instantly they began tearing off his clothing.

He was quite powerless. All he could do was to nerve himself with fortitude to meet the fate that was in store for him.

For he knew there was not a particle of pity in the breasts of any of these men. What they said they would do, would be done. There would be no relenting.

The man had on his back a red flannel shirt.

As one of the bandits threw this on the ground Frank James gave a shout.

Like lightning he sprang to his feet and rushed to the spot where the article of clothing had fallen.

He picked it up.

The keen eye of the bandit had noticed that something white showed up against the red material.

It was a piece of paper.

Frank James looked at it with astonishment.

For it is quite an unusual thing for a man to have a piece of paper sewed inside his shirt against his breast.

Yet this is what the bandit saw was actually the case.

All the bandits except the two who were holding the prisoner crowded round.

These two, however, desisted from their work of stripping him.

For they were as keenly interested as the rest in what was going on.

Frank James looked at the paper.

To his surprise he found it was completely blank.

This was most unexpected.
The faces of the bandits fell.
For they had imagined they were about to make a most momentous discovery.
"That's the end of it, boys," cried Frank James.
"What is?"
"Why, there's nothing in it, Jesse."
"Let me see."
The bandit king took the red flannel shirt in his hands and keenly scrutinized it.
He saw that the paper was sewn on to the cloth.
"Give me a knife, boys."
"What for?"
"To rip this stitching off. I reckon there may be something on the other side."
Wood Hite handed Jesse James a keen-bladed knife.
With it the bandit king cut off the thread that held the paper to the flannel.
"Hark!" shouted Ed Kelly.
"What?"
"There's someone in the wood."
"By Heaven, so there is!" shouted Frank James.
Quick as lightning the bandits rushed in a body towards the spot from which the sound proceeded.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FARMER ON THE TRAIL OF THE BANDITS.

In their excitement they thought of nothing but that someone may have seen or overheard what had taken place.
In all directions they looked.
But they saw nothing of any human being.
"I'm dead sure I heard something move!" cried Ed Kelly.
"May have been an animal."
"Think not, Jim."
"Well, we've had a pretty good look and couldn't find anything, so I guess it's all right," said the bandit king; "let's go back."
Quickly the bandits hurried back to the space around the fire.
Instantly they raised a loud shout.
The prisoner was gone!
The bandits looked at each other.
"We're a lot of darned fools!" cried the bandit king, savagely.
"You couldn't very well expect the cuss to wait for us to come back and make a target of his body."
Undoubtedly the bandits had been guilty of gross negligence.
"It's no good talking about it," said Frank James; "he's gone and that's all there is to it."
"Sure."
"How about the paper?"
"What, the piece I took off his shirt?"
"Yes."
"That's not worth a red, boys."
"Why?"
"Look at it."
The bandit king displayed it to the gaze of the men.
Slowly he turned it around.
Then they saw that both sides of it were blank.
Amazement was on the faces of all the bandits.
"Not a word on it," muttered Jesse James.
"This beats me."
After a time he folded the paper up and put it in his pocket.
"Well, boys," he said, "we've had a lot of trouble for nothing, that's what it looks like, but I'll bet my life still that there's something mysterious about this affair."
"Get on your horses, boys," said the bandit king, after a few moments' thought, "I reckon we'll take chances and skip."
In a few minutes the men were all mounted.
They had removed their masks, for it was daylight.
Arrived at the edge of the forest, the men split up into small parties and rode by different routes towards the cave.
They had not been gone more than fifteen minutes when a strange figure might have been seen crawling along the ground toward the open space around the fire.
Once in the open space all his fears seemed to vanish.
He sprang forward and seized the red flannel shirt which was still lying in the grass.
"Gone!" he exclaimed, in tones of despair.
In all directions the man moved.
Not a spot on the ground was overlooked in the keen search he made.
But he found nothing.
Turning round, he was about to make his way into the recesses

of the forest, when the sight that met his eyes completely staggered him.

For he saw a stranger standing in front of him with a shooter in his hand. This weapon he presented at the head of the escaped prisoner.

The man with the mutilated nose staggered back.

"I guess this is a bit of a surprise," said the man who was holding the pistol, with a laugh.

"Who in thunder are you?"

"I guess that's not very important. The question is what am I here for, that's more to the point."

The prisoner stared hard at the stranger.

He saw before him a brown-bearded man.

It was the farmer who had been on the stage.

But the other man did not recognize him.

Yet he was considerably alarmed at the statement that he was known.

"Yes, mister," continued the brown-bearded farmer. "I've seen everything that's gone on from the time you left the stage to night I was on board of it."

"You mean to say you followed us?"

"Yes, by gosh! I shadowed you and I reckon I'll see this thing through. You want to find that piece of paper. I advise you to tell me all about it."

"I don't admit anything; but if what you say's true, why in heaven's name should I take you into my confidence?"

"Because I'm the only man who can help you."

"You look like it!" laughed the other sneeringly, as he surveyed the man with the pistol. "Guess this kind of work's not in a hayseed's line."

"Very well, I'll take this thing on alone," replied the brown-bearded farmer in an off-handed manner.

"Do what you like," growled the prisoner, "so long's you get out of my way. This kind of thing makes me tired."

The farmer said nothing for some little time.

He seemed deep in thought.

He soon arrived at a conclusion.

"Very well," he said, "as you won't take my advice I leave you to do what you please. Take care and keep out of my path, though, or our next meeting may not end so pleasantly."

Before the other man had recovered from the surprise this speech occasioned him the farmer had disappeared.

He had sprung amidst the trees.

After walking several miles the farmer found himself on an extremely elevated spot of ground, from which he was able to see a wide stretch of country.

A valley lay at his feet.

Lying on the grass, there was no risk of his being seen.

He looked in every direction.

For some hours he remained in this spot, quite motionless.

His principal object was to rest. At the same time he took good care that nothing should escape his notice.

It was while he was looking into the valley immediately beneath him that he saw two horsemen riding slowly along.

The men were at no great distance beneath him.

Then the farmer saw them both stop outside a small house that lay alongside the road.

They dismounted and went inside.

For a moment or two the farmer thought of staying where he was.

"Guess I'll run the risk anyway," he muttered. "I may hear them talk."

He made some slight changes in his appearance.

It had been so dark in the stage that he fancied the bandit king would not recognize him as one of the passengers.

He walked into the inn.

Taking no notice of Jesse James and Jim Cummins, who was with him, the farmer went and sat down at the same table at which the two bandits were seated.

But he kept some distance from them.

Smoking his pipe and drinking whisky, the farmer was able to observe everything that went on.

The first few words that came to his ears showed him that he would be able to hear what was said.

Jesse James put his hand in his pocket and took out something. It was the blank paper that he had taken from the man with the mutilated nose.

"There it is, Jim," he said, spreading it on the table in front of him.

"Oh, put it away," cried Jim Cummins, in an angry tone. "If you don't I'll burn it. I'm tired of seeing it!"

"Well, I'll put it away," replied Jesse James, putting it in his pocket.

The bandit king looked at the farmer once or twice.

But very carelessly he did so. Evidently he had not the faintest

that the man in front of him had been one of the passengers by the stage.

Jim Cummins rose.

"What's the matter?" asked Jesse James hastily.

"I'm off."

"Where?"

"Back to join the boys. What's the good of staying here?"

"I'll have to," said the bandit king.

"Why?"

"Because I want to see Black Jake."

Black Jake's right name was Jacob Monks, but he was known only by the other cognomen.

"You needn't wait," said Jesse James; "get back to the boys and let 'em know why I'm late. I'll come along."

"Very well."

Jim Cummins got on his horse and rode away.

Black Jake was the landlord of the inn.

He had ridden away to visit a friend, and he did not return as soon as the bandit king expected.

When he got back it was quite dark.

"Hulloa, Jesse!" he cried.

"Well, Jake, how goes it?"

"Fine."

"That's good. I've been waiting some hours for you. Sit down here. I've got a lot to say."

"Sure!"

The two men talked together earnestly in low tones for quite an hour.

Then Jesse James left the table.

The bandit king wished his friend good-night, got on Siroc's back and slowly rode away.

He had not been gone a minute when the farmer left the inn.

The bandit king was in no hurry.

It was quite dark.

Therefore he ran little danger.

Along the road he went at a slow pace, with a cigar between his lips, and his thoughts occupied with what Black Jake had told him.

"Yes, I think there's money in it," muttered the bandit king.

Now he was at the foot of a hill, and he had almost arrived at a wooden bridge by which the stream that ran through the valley was crossed.

Scarcely had he said the words, than a figure appeared in the road before him.

"Halt!" cried a voice in ringing tones.

The astonished bandit king saw, gleaming in the moonlight, the muzzle of a six-shooter.

The bandit king was thunderstruck.

He reined in Siroc instantly.

As he did so he saw the mysterious stranger walking towards him, still keeping him covered all the while.

Now the man was quite close to the bandit king.

"Jesse James," he said, in stern accents, "I want you to dismount!"

The man hesitated a moment.

"First," he added, "I'll remove your shooting irons. Thank you," he said, as he took two revolvers from the bandit king's belt. "I've got enough of this kind of thing," laughed the man.

With these words he threw the two pistols into the river.

"Now, come down!"

Jesse had not spoken a word.

He was furious with passion.

But he dare not resist. He was now quite unarmed.

"I'll trouble you for that piece of paper you have in your pocket—there!"

With his hand the stranger indicated where the paper lay.

Reluctantly the bandit king handed the man the piece of paper.

"Take it!" he said, furiously.

"Well, yes; you bet I will!" said the stranger.

The bandit king had been staring hard at the man.

He had recognized him now. He saw it was the farmer who had been in the inn while he and Jim Cummins were there.

The farmer took the piece of paper and placed it very carefully in a small leather case he carried with him.

In doing so he was naturally not giving quite as much attention to the bandit king as he should have done.

This was Jesse James' chance.

The bandit king's faculties never failed him. He was always on the alert.

With a bound like a panther he sprang full at the detective.

Bang!

As he did so, in an almost involuntary manner the farmer fired.

But the bullet did not go near the bandit king.

Henceforth the six-shooter was of no possible use to the farmer.

The bandit king had seized him in a grip of iron.

And it was a life and death struggle.

"Curse you!" hissed Jesse James through his clenched teeth, whilst his eyes darted fire as they glared at the other man.

The farmer had been taken at a disadvantage.

Seized, almost before he was aware of it, in the strong arms of Jesse James for a few moments, matters looked very desperate with him.

Desperately he struggled to release his arms from the grasp of the bandit king.

Jesse James relaxed none of his efforts.

He was making the most desperate exertions.

Then with one supreme effort, the farmer managed to free his arms from the vise-like grasp in which they had been held.

Quick as lightning he seized Jesse James by the throat.

No child's fingers were now around the neck of the bandit king.

Jesse James knew that a few moments would end the desperate struggle.

For the farmer was throttling him.

A suffocating feeling was stealing over the bandit king.

Then with a terrific movement, Jesse James, releasing his hold of the farmer, shook himself free from the deadly embrace of his opponent.

Without one minute's hesitation, he made a mad rush at the farmer, and knocked him right off the ground into the river, which swollen by the recent rains, was running furiously along.

Then stooping down the bandit king took hold of the pistol which the other man had dropped.

The flood had borne the farmer rapidly down the stream.

Along the bank rushed the bandit king with his six-shooter in his hand looking for the man in the river.

At length he saw him.

Bang!

Quickly raising his weapon he fired.

The man in the river had foreseen this.

He had dived down into the water.

For some time he kept below.

When he reappeared on the surface he was a long way from the bandit king and farther out in the middle of the stream.

Jesse James followed him up.

Again he fired.

But he was once more foiled by the same tactics.

Then the bandit king saw the man disappearing behind a small island in the water.

Everything was clear as day.

For the moon was shining brightly.

Speechless with amazement stood Jesse James.

The moonlight had revealed a secret to him.

No longer was the man in the water wearing a beard.

Deprived of this by the action of the water, his features were no longer hidden.

Jesse knew that the man on the island was Carl Greene.

CHAPTER VII.

CARL GREENE'S DESPERATE POSITION.

The bandit king had made no mistake.

The man with whom he had been struggling so desperately was Carl Greene.

The famous detective had only recently arrived in this part of Missouri.

Several outrages had taken place.

A train had been held up, and an attempt to rob a bank had been made.

These daring acts were attributed to the James Boys.

So Carl Greene had journeyed here to do his utmost against the bandits.

As we have seen, he was one of the passengers by the stage on the night when the bandits had stopped it.

Jesse James was aghast when he first discovered that his antagonist was no other than Carl Greene.

Then a feeling of intense rage came over him.

He was furious to think that all his plans should be thwarted by the famous young detective.

"I must kill him," said the bandit king to himself with a savage expression on his face.

Then the question arose as to how this was to be done.

The detective was seated on an island in the stream.

The bandit king had no intention of swimming out there to attack him.

He could see nothing to do but to wait and trust to chance.

On the bridge that crossed the river the bandit king posted himself.

From here he could command the whole of the river.
So if Carl Greene had left the island on either side Jesse James would have seen him, and would at once have rushed down the bank of the river to prevent the escape of the detective.

Several hours passed, and Carl Greene made no move.
He dare not do so.

He saw that Jesse James was keenly watching him.

And Carl Greene knew that under these circumstances it was useless to attempt to swim ashore.

The bandit king would have put a bullet into him.

The detective saw no chance of escape.

Carl Greene's position was a desperate one, and he realized it.

Both men heard the sounds of horsemen approaching at the same time.

"Great Scott! Perhaps Jesse's got off the road and lost his way."

The bandit king heard the voices.

He recognized who the speakers were.

"That you, boys?" he shouted.

"It's Jesse!" they cried.

"You bet it is!"

"Where are you?"

"On the bridge!"

The bandits rode up to where the bandit king was standing.

"What's the meaning of this, Jesse?"

"What?"

"Why, gosh," said Bob Ford, "we thought something had happened to you. Jim got to the cave hours ago, and we expected you every minute."

"Where are you off to now?"

"Nowhere, only looking for you. We were going to ride up to the inn."

"Ah," said the bandit king; "you needn't do that now anyway; something has happened to me."

"You don't say!" cried Ed Kelly. "You do look a bit shook up, now I come to inspect you."

"Shook up, boys! Why, it's a wonder I'm here at all. I had to struggle for my life."

"Who with?"

"Carl Greene."

"Carl Greene!" exclaimed Frank James. "You're fooling us!"

"Am I?" said Jesse, holding up a six-shooter. "This is his gun anyway."

"Snakes! you must have been close to him," remarked Wood Hite.

"I was."

"Why did you let him escape?"

"He hasn't."

"How's that?"

"He got into the river. He's on that island over there."

The bandit king pointed to the small island in the river where Carl Greene now was.

For a moment the bandits gazed speechless with amazement in the direction indicated.

The news had astounded them.

Then they gave a loud shout of triumph.

For it seemed to them that the detective was now fairly within their grasp.

The bandits all dismounted.

They hitched their horses up to the trees which grew by the bank of the river.

Siroc had remained close to the bandit king during the life and death struggle that had taken place on the brink of the river.

Now Jesse James led him amongst the rest of the horses.

"Now, boys," he said, "let's have a look round. I've not moved from here before, because I thought he might get away if I did."

Down the banks of the river went the bandits. There were some on either side.

The shade of the trees made the place dark.

However, the bandits were able to locate the position of the island.

"It's easy enough to get to him."

"How, Bob?"

"Why, by swimming there, of course."

"And a nice reception we'd get! Bullets isn't exactly the sort of thing that suits me."

"That's impossible."

"Why?"

"Didn't Jesse say Carl Greene hadn't got any weapons?"

"Thunder! I forgot that. It's a soft snap."

Carl Greene had been listening anxiously to their proceedings.

He had expected to be attacked.

If he had had his six-shooter, he would have not felt doubtful about the result.

But the detective, as we know, had lost his pistol.

He was defenseless.

The detective felt that all was lost.

He had made up his mind to plunge in the stream rather than allow the bandits to land on the island and capture him.

For he recollected the horrible fate of all the enemies of the James Boys.

And he knew that they would surpass themselves in the tortures they would inflict on him.

"Better to die at once than gratify their passions," muttered Carl Greene.

He was about to plunge into the stream at the lower end of the small island he was on.

Suddenly his foot struck against something.

Stooping, he felt the object against which he had stumbled.

It was a long wooden rail of considerable thickness.

Evidently the current had washed it up on the rocks.

The possession of this piece of wood changed Carl Greene's views.

His face now wore a different expression.

No longer did he despair.

He crouched down behind one of the high rocks that was on the small island.

As he did so he could hear the bandits in the water.

Cautiously he peered out into the darkness.

As he did so he fancied he could detect the head of one of the swimmers a few yards from the rock.

"Now is my time," said the detective to himself.

He seized the long wooden rail firmly with both hands.

With wonderful speed he sprang from his place of concealment.

Whirling the timber around his head he brought it down with terrific force on what he had conceived to be the head of one of the bandits.

The blow was a terrible one.

If it had struck the man it would have smashed his skull!

But Carl Greene had made a mistake.

What he had taken for the man's face was a piece of wood floating on the surface of the water.

However, as it was the rail had met the water very near the swimmer.

Quick as lightning the man—it was Ed Kelly—had dived beneath the stream.

Desperately he struck out.

Under the water he swam along.

When he emerged he found he had been carried beyond the island and was safe out of reach of the murderous weapon wielded by the detective.

The rest of the bandits had seen and heard what had happened. Only dimly had they seen the affair.

But they had heard enough to know how dangerous any advance on their part would be.

As they turned aside and went down stream after Ed Kelly they could see the dark figure of the detective on the island.

There he stood with the rail over his shoulder, waiting to resist any attack that might be made.

But the bandits had no thought of doing anything of the kind.

Meanwhile, time was rapidly moving on.

Every moment was precious.

Carl Greene was beginning to hope that he might yet escape.

The bandits were standing under a big tree.

The branches of this tree grew right out over the river.

Between this bank of the stream and the island the water was simply a torrent. It was traveling with such frightful velocity that no one could have lived in such a flood.

But from this bank to the island was not nearly as far as the distance which separated the island from the opposite shore.

"How far over the river does this tree stretch?" said one of the bandits.

The men looked up and strained their eyes to follow the course of the branches.

"It goes right out to the island," exclaimed Bob Ford.

"You're sure?"

"Quite."

"Why, look here, Jesse," said the man; "all we've got to do is to crawl along the branch of the tree."

"Go on!"

"When we're out there we'll give him some lead. Guess that dose'll about do for him."

The scheme was daring in the extreme.

The bandits were silent for a few minutes after the talk.

Evidently they were thinking things over.

"Who's going to do this?" cried the bandit king at length.

"I am," said the man who had made the proposition.

"Gosh! I've got no objection," laughed the bandit king. "only I tell you it's a tough job."

"I know it's a big contract, Jesse, but reckon I'll carry it through."

"Very well; out you go."

The bandit king had spoken truly when he alluded to the danger of the undertaking.

But these desperate men were afraid of nothing.

And when the object of their attack was Carl Greene their audacity increased.

For he was their hated foe. To remove him from their path they were ready to dare anything.

The bandit who was to undertake the dangerous work lost no time. He climbed up the tree.

Then, with great care, he selected what appeared to be the longest branch.

This done, he proceeded to crawl along the limb over the river.

The detective had remained on the alert.

He knew now that the bandits were coming along the tree to attack him.

This was a more deadly and dangerous mode of proceeding than the one they had previously tried.

Carl Greene seemed paralyzed.

For a few moments the fear that an unseen foe was hovering overhead seemed to crush him.

But he shook this feeling off.

Again he prepared to do his utmost to meet this new attack.

He looked keenly upward and saw that several branches of the tree were hanging over the island.

He blamed himself for not making this discovery sooner.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed, "why shouldn't I have got away along that tree? I might have done it while Jesse James was waiting here alone."

He fancied there was yet a chance of escape. At any rate, he thought that he might manage to leave the island.

The rail which he had used as a means of defense when the bandits swam toward the island would serve him now.

At one end of it was a very long nail, which projected from the wood.

With this Carl Greene hoped to be able to pull the branch down sufficiently far as to enable him to reach it.

He lost not a moment in going to work.

The detective was successful in hooking the branch at the first attempt.

He pulled at the rail with all his strength, endeavoring to lower the branch so that he could grasp it.

Naturally the bandit heard him.

And the man knew what the noise meant. But he could see nothing of the detective owing to the darkness. If he fired he would have to do so at random.

Carl Greene managed to clutch the limb of the tree.

As he did so, he threw aside the rail with which he had pulled it down.

Rebounding, the branch dragged him off the ground.

In mid-air the detective was suspended with the boiling waters beneath him.

His situation was desperate.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S SUCCESSFUL STRATAGEM.

Carl Greene expected every moment that the branch to which he was clinging would break.

Then he would fall into the water and have a slight chance of reaching land.

Cautiously, still hanging, Carl Greene made his way along the tree towards the trunk.

It was very slow work.

At length the detective found that the vibration was less.

No longer did his weight bear the branch down as it had done.

So he naturally concluded he had reached a stronger portion of the limb.

Now he endeavored to throw his legs up.

After much exertion he succeeded in doing so.

In a few moments he was seated on the branch, panting and breathless after his terrible efforts.

Here he rested.

The bandits on the bank had no idea of what had taken place.

The bandit who had crawled out on the branch of the tree had only a dim notion.

He could see nothing and had to trust entirely to sound.

And the noise of the rushing waters which roared continuously made it most difficult to determine what was transpiring.

Carl Greene knew that now was his only chance to get away.

If the bandits knew what had happened he felt that it would be almost hopeless for him to endeavor to descend. If he did he would find them waiting to receive him.

Meanwhile, the bandit who had gone along the tree, was not idle.

He had proceeded rapidly.

It would have been better if he had exercised more caution.

For, suddenly, the branch of the tree on which he was broke.

The man fell down instantly.

But he did not descend into the water.

He was right over the island, and on it he fell.

Instantly he sprang to his feet, pistol in hand, ready to defend himself.

For he expected that Carl Greene would at once attack him.

But nothing of the kind took place.

The bandit began to move about on the small island on which he was.

In a few moments he had completely traversed it.

Then he realized that Carl Greene had gone.

"Cut his stick," he muttered. "Jumped into the river, I guess."

Then he recollected the noise he had noticed a few minutes ago.

Looking up he saw dimly several branches hanging over his head.

"By heaven!" he cried, "I believe he's got up into the tree."

To the man the audacity of this proceeding seemed almost incredible.

But he knew how daring Carl Greene was.

Instantly he began to shout to his companions on the bank.

"Listen!"

The bandit king held up his hand for silence.

They could hear the man on the island shouting:

"Carl Greene, tree!"

This is all they could make out.

"Carl Greene, tree," said Jesse James, "what in thunder does this mean?"

"Can't make out."

"Can't you, Bob?"

"You bet your life I can't, Frank."

"Gosh! wonder if he means that Carl Greene's got away from the island by the tree?" observed Frank James.

"Great Scott! that must be it, boys," shouted Jesse James, "we're jays to stand here wondering like this."

Instantly the bandits ran towards the trunk of the tree.

As they did so they heard a noise above them!

But this almost instantly ceased.

"That's him," said Jesse James in a whisper.

"Let's go after him."

"All right."

Instantly the bandits ran toward the trunk of the tree.

As they did so, Carl Greene moved cautiously along the branch he was on toward the trunk.

A daring scheme entered his head.

He decided to act on it at once.

Quickly and quietly he moved nearer the three bandits.

"Boys," he said in a whisper.

"Yes."

"He's on the branch right in front of you—don't let him escape."

"Escape!" hissed Bob Ford through his clenched teeth in passionate tones. "I'll forgive him if he does."

"I'll go and tell Jesse."

"Right; we're enough for him, for he hasn't got any weapons."

He knew that the bandit king was amongst them.

"I must pass him," muttered Carl Greene.

He leaned over and sang out in a loud whisper:

"Jesse!"

The bandit king heard him.

"Yes,—what is it?"

"Carl Greene's on that branch over there."

"How d'you know?"

"Because Bob Ford and Ed Kelly have seen him."

"They'll look after him," said the bandit king savagely.

"He may drop."

"Thunder! that's possible!"

Quick as lightning the bandit king, followed by the men with him, ran and placed himself under the bough on which the imagined detective now was.

Down the tree he glided.

Reaching the bottom he found that the bandits were no longer there.

"See anything of him Jess?" he cried.

"No, but I guess the boys up in the tree 'll make things hum in a minute."

"You bet they will."

Carl Greene could not refrain from laughing as he said this. The bandits had been completely fooled.

Jesse James was paying no attention to Carl Greene.

He imagined that he was one of the band.

His whole thoughts were centered on the detective, whom he expected every minute would fall from the tree a corpse.

Carl Greene was jubilant.

All his dangers were over.

Now he knew that he could escape the bandits.

For at the back amid the trees he would find in the dense vegetation, safe hiding places.

The bandits would have no chance of finding him.

So, secure in his knowledge he waited on, for he was curious to see what would happen in the tree.

Bang! Bang!

The bandits were excited.

That is, the bandits who were under the tree.

"He's killed!" shouted Jesse.

"Listen!"

Clell Miller grasped the arm of the bandit king.

"There's some talking going on up above!"

"They finished Carl Greene and now they are talking about it," cried the bandit king.

"That may be."

Bang! Bang!

These sounds were followed by cries.

"There's something wrong, Jesse."

"Can't be Clell."

"Jesse! Jesse!"

"They're calling to you. That's Bob Ford."

"Well, Bob, what is it?"

"Carl Greene's gone."

"What?" exclaimed the bandit king in tones of amazement.

"It's true."

"Dropped from the tree?"

"No, Jesse. He's fooled us and gone, that's dead sure."

The bandit king was astounded at this news.

Carl Greene had heard enough.

He glided into the thick bushes and was hidden from view.

CHAPTER IX.

CARL GREENE OVERHEARS THE BANDITS' PLOT.

In a few minutes Bob Ford and the other bandits had reached the ground.

"We've been fooled, Jesse," cried Bob Ford savagely.

"How?"

"Anybody get down from the tree?"

"Yes, Bob; it was the man who'd been out after Carl Greene."

"You're wrong."

"That's bosh; I talked to him."

"I can't help that. That man was Carl Greene himself."

It was difficult to persuade the bandit king that this was so.

But when he saw the man for whom he had taken Carl Greene he hesitated no longer.

Bob Ford rapidly told what had happened.

"We got out on the branch, Jesse, for that demon told us that Carl Greene was out there."

"You mean you spoke with him?"

"Sure!"

"Great Scott! he beats everything."

"Well, we nearly shot Bill here," cried Frank James. "hadn't we better look out for Carl Greene?"

"Can if you like," growled the bandit king: "but you don't think I've stood here yarning if there was any chance of coming across him."

Frank James came back in a few minutes.

He saw that to find Carl Greene in this densely grown forest, and the darkness of the night, was not to be thought of.

"It's hopeless," he cried.

"He's escaped us. Say no more about it!" cried the bandit king.

"We'd better go back to the cave."

The bandits then mounted their horses and rode away.

For it meant that he had more time in which to counteract the schemes of the bandits.

Whilst he was debating what he should do the bandits arrived at the top of the bluff.

Looking down they found that the station was beneath them.

"Thought you said that the station master went home at eleven o'clock, Jess?"

"So he does, Bob."

"Not to night, anyway."

"How's that?"

"Look."

"Great Scott! you're right. There's a light there!"

"Yes, and that shows he's in the office."

"It does."

"It means," said Frank James, "that we will have to alter our plans somewhat."

"We must."

After travelling for some distance Carl Greene stopped. He was completely exhausted.

The detective was about to get under some bushes with a view of sleeping when his eye fell on a wooden shanty about a hundred yards away.

Going over, he found that it was little better than a ruin and was completely deserted.

But it would answer his purpose.

He entered and shut the dilapidated door.

Then throwing himself on some straw which was lying in one corner of the hut, in a few minutes he was in a profound sleep.

CHAPTER X.

CARL GREENE DISCOVERS THE SECRET OF THE BLANK PAPER.

Carl Greene slept for many hours.

When he awoke he felt quite refreshed.

It was still light, but getting toward evening.

Sitting up, the detective looked around him.

He saw that the building he was in was only a ruin, and he determined to seek other quarters without delay.

For he was thirsty and hungry.

He put his hand in his pocket, thinking that he had some whisky there.

But he found that the bottle had vanished.

Nothing was in his pocket but a small leather case.

The sight of this brought back to Carl Greene the incidents of the preceding night.

At once he recollected the paper which he had taken from the bandit king.

To get this he had periled his life.

The subsequent exciting events had quite driven it from his mind.

He noticed that the leather case was still very wet.

"Gosh, p'haps the paper's ruined," he muttered.

But drawing it forth he saw that it was perfectly dry.

The water of the river had not penetrated the leather.

Carefully Carl Greene took the paper in his hands.

He looked at it long and closely.

But his look resulted in complete disappointment.

For it conveyed no more information to him than it had to the bandits.

"Quite blank," he muttered.

He turned it every way and scanned it with keen anxiety.

But all to no purpose.

A blank piece of paper does not convey much information.

The detective was quite disheartened.

All his labor had been in vain.

Yet he could not understand why the man from whom the bandits took the paper had preferred to sacrifice his life rather than confess what he knew.

"A man doesn't die for an ordinary scrap of paper," mused the detective, "it beats me completely."

Then Carl Greene noticed for the first time that the paper was fashioned somewhat in the shape of a heart.

There was no mistake about this, although the resemblance was not very striking.

"By jingo!" exclaimed Carl Greene, "it must be the shape of the paper that makes it valuable! It was being sent to someone as a signal. Yes, that must be about the size of it."

Carl Greene was satisfied that he had at last hit upon the truth.

But if this was so, it was of no earthly use to him.

Only the people in the secret could know what the design conveyed. It imparted no intelligence to the detective.

The detective dropped the piece of paper on the ground where he was sitting.

He almost dismissed the subject from his mind.

He was thinking now as to what his next move should be.

Then, some time later, he picked up the paper mechanically.

Holding it in a vertical position he happened to glance along the paper.

Then he saw, to his surprise, certain faint marks upon it as if slight impressions had been made with a pointed instrument.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "I have it now. Fool that I have been not to get onto it before! You'll have to retire from business, Carl Greene," he added with a laugh, "if you go to sleep in this fashion."

Putting the paper carefully away in his pocket, he arose from the ground.

Then he walked around, picking up any small pieces of dry wood that he found lying about.

In a few minutes he had collected quite a heap.

Taking some of the old straw upon which he had slept, and applying a match, in a few moments he had, with the aid of the sticks, kindled a fire.

It burned brightly.

Then adding a few large logs to the blazing heap, he now had a fire which threw out considerable heat.

At the same time the flames arising from it brilliantly illuminated the small hut.

The detective again drew the paper from his pocket.

He held it so close to the fire that it was in danger of being scorched.

This, however, he was careful to avoid.

With anxious look he kept his eye fixed upon the paper.

Soon a smile appeared upon his face.

His eyes beamed.

"I thought so," he cried triumphantly. "Now to see what news it tells me."

Drawing the paper back from the fire, the detective saw that it was almost completely covered with writing.

As he had suspected, the man who had dispatched it had written on it with invisible ink.

The heat of the fire had caused the words on the paper to show plainly.

The writing had assumed a dark-brown color.

"It's lucky for me," said Carl Green to himself, "that the James Boys didn't think of this. And yet it's not surprising, for I guess I've had more experience than any of them, and it was only by accident I hit on the secret."

Then the detective, bending down toward the flames, settled himself to read what was on the paper.

It read as follows:

"At last I have unearthed Sam Salter, but it won't be an easy matter to get hold of him. We must be very careful, but I am satisfied the thing can be worked. If he had the slightest suspicion he had been shadowed to his retreat he would leave at once. Then will commence another long search; we want to avoid this."

"You two men ought to know how to work it; I trust you both, but the man who carries this knows nothing of what is written on it. You can do as you please about telling him; he thinks that the shape of the paper conveys the information."

"Now to the point. The villain, Salter, is living in a house in one of the wildest parts of Missouri."

"It is not far from Parker's Point, and you'll know his house by the wall round it."

"This must have been built by some freak."

"Don't lose a moment; get the money."

"He can't have spent much of it. It takes a long time to melt one hundred thousand dollars."

"I found this out by accident from a fellow prisoner. They sent me up for six months so I can do nothing, and he may have skipped before I get out. However, I managed to send this letter. Lose no time. Our fortunes are made if you act promptly. T. S."

P. S.—Kill him if you get the chance. He deserves it for the trick he played upon us when he vanished with the plunder."

The detective was silent for some moments after reading this extraordinary epistle.

Well he might be. For certainly nothing of a more startling nature had ever fallen under his notice.

"One hundred thousand dollars!" he exclaimed; "it's a prize worth playing for. It's evident that the men mixed up in this are a gang of crooks who work upon a big scale, and the man with the money is the one of the crowd who thought he'd keep the lot."

The detective saw that he had to deal with a difficult case.

But he imagined he would eventually triumph.

For the letter gave him the name of the place where the man was living.

It also informed him that a wall was built around the house.

This was important, for Carl Greene knew that it was the only house near that was encircled in such a manner.

"The man's name I've got too," added the detective; "but that doesn't amount to anything. Of course, he's travelling under an alias name."

The detective congratulated himself on what had happened.

He hoped that this case would be the success of his life.

At present he was ignorant of all the details concerning the crime that must have been committed by these men. But inquiry would soon tell him all he wanted to know.

However, this was of no importance now.

What was important was to find Parker's Point.

Carl Greene was well acquainted with the neighborhood.

But he had never heard of such a place.

"I must lose no time that's certain, but how in thunder am I to find it out?" he muttered.

Then after a few minutes pause, he added, with a laugh:

"Not by staying here, that's sure."

At once he placed the paper very carefully in the leather case.

Then he left the hut.

He was quite uncertain how to act.

For some time he walked along in an aimless fashion.

Then he stopped and again thought the matter over.

"Guess I'll go into the town," he said to himself.

It was now dark, but still comparatively early in the evening.

He bought two revolvers and resumed his journey.

After Carl Greene had tramped several miles he came to an inn.

Instantly he recognized that it was the house kept by Black Jake.

"He won't know me," muttered the detective as he entered, "for I'm quite changed from what I was when I was here yesterday."

Carl Greene was ready to run considerable danger.

For he was in a half starved condition. Such food as the inn possessed was speedily placed before him, and until he had satisfied his hunger he never said a word to the landlord, who stood looking at his rapacious guest.

"I feel better now," said the detective with a smile.

"By gosh! you ought to," muttered Black Jake. "I never saw a man eat like that in all my life."

Carl Greene laughed.

"Wall, I guess, mister, if you'd been travelin' round with nothing inside you fer four and twenty hours you'd feel mortal empty, eh? Let's hev some more corn juice."

The detective then helped himself pretty liberally to the spirit.

"Fill yer glass, mister," he said, "et's mighty lonesome drinkin' alone."

"Thank you, I will," answered Black Jake, "but I find the whiskey tastes just the same whether I'm by myself or not."

"Say!"

"Well?" said the landlord.

"You know anythin' 'bout these parts?"

"Know anything about these parts? Well, now I should smile. If you want to find anyone within a hundred miles of this inn come to me. I'm a walking directory. I was raised down here, and I've been down here all my life."

"Guess yer the man I'm lookin' fer. Light yer pipe an' we'll talk."

"Sure."

The two men commenced to smoke.

CHAPTER XI.

CARL GREENE AGAIN FALLS IN WITH THE BANDITS.

"It ain't a very important matter, mister," said Carl Greene, "but I reckon if you could put me on the right track et'd save some time."

"Let me hear."

"I will."

"I want to find a place called Parker's Point and I'm on the tramp to find et."

"Where're you from?"

"Down 'bout hundred miles."

"What made you come this way?"

"Heard Parker's Point was up hyar and so I set out to tramp et. But gosh! when I got further from my home no one seemed to have heard of et."

"And so you came here, thinking I'd know?"

"I came hyar to eat an' drink," laughed Carl Greene "but guess there's no harm in askin'?"

"Not a bit."

"Ef you can help me, mister, I'd be 'bliged."

"Parker's Point!" muttered the landlord: "where in thunder's that now? Gosh! I've heard the name but it must be mighty small! Reckon there's not many houses there, eh?"

"Can't say. Don't know any more about it than you."

"Parker's Point," again muttered the landlord. "Great Scott! I've got it! I know where it is now!"

Carl Greene had difficulty in restraining himself.

He was anxious not to let the landlord know how valuable this information was to him.

"Yes, mister, I told you this was the right shop to come to for information, but you bothered me just a bit. You see, it's just like this, people don't call the place Parker's Point any longer."

"How's that?"

"Well, it was named after an old cuss that lived there. He died twenty years back."

"Did you know him?"

"Well, yes, he built himself a house like a prison, with a high wall round it. We all reckoned he was crazy."

"Guess he was."

"After he died they called the place Pine Bluff, though I reckon some folks call it by the old name still."

Carl Greene was delighted. He had obtained the most valuable information.

Now he knew that the statement in the letter was true.

Black Jake's words confirmed it.

He spoke of the house surrounded by a stone wall. This was enough.

"You haven't told me where it is. Hev I got to go to the town?"

"Don't go near et. Keep right on this road and ask for Pine Bluff. You'll make out all right."

The detective had obtained all the information that was necessary.

He rose to go.

"What's up?" said the landlord,

"I'm goin'."

"You can't reach Pine Bluff to night."

"How's that?"

"It's forty miles?"

"I can git towards et."

"Sure, but you'll have to sleep somewhere anyway, unless you're going to turn in on the road, and I reckon you ain't that sort of a chap."

The detective came to the conclusion that a few hours delay would not matter much.

He did not wish the landlord to think him unduly anxious to reach Pine Bluff.

For he did not want Black Jake to imagine that much depended upon the visit.

It was impossible for him to be too cautious.

"Guess I'll sleep a bit, anyway."

"That's sensible. You can get up when it's light and go on. Now we'll have a good time, mister. It's my turn to set up. Fill your glass."

Carl Greene did so.

He and the landlord sat drinking and talking a considerable time.

At length the detective announced his intention of retiring.

He was not tired, having slept the greater part of the day.

But he wanted some excuse for getting away from the whisky.

At the back of the room where the two men had been sitting was the kitchen.

Adjoining this, at the side of the house, was the room wherein Carl Greene was to pass the night.

He entered it and bolted the door.

He had no sooner done so than three horsemen galloped up to the inn.

Carl Green heard them.

He had no reason to feel the least bit anxious as to who they might be.

But he decided that it was not desirable for him to retire to rest just at present.

As was said before, he was not sleepy.

He determined to keep on the watch during the night.

He knew Black Jake, the landlord, no one bore a worse reputation than this man.

He was Jesse James' closest friend. It was quite certain that he would stick at nothing.

The detective heard the three men enter the inn.

"Hulloa, Jesse!" he heard Black Jake cry.

Carl Greene started.

"By heaven, the bandit king," he gasped. "I seem fated to run across his trail. I hope he hasn't tracked me here."

The next few minutes were anxious ones for Carl Greene.

It might be that he had a fight for his life again before him.

The bandit king and his companions had entered the inn apparently quite unconcerned as to who might be about.

But they relied on their friend the landlord.

Black Jake possessed a wonderful faculty for detecting dangerous people.

In a few minutes the three bandits and the landlord were seated around a table near the window of the room they were in, smoking and drinking.

All this time Carl Greene was dying with impatience to know what the talk was about.

He could not hear a word.

Yet he felt that it was of the utmost importance that he should do so.

For he reasoned that nothing but matters of weight would have brought the bandits from their retreat.

The detective resolved to make an attempt to get within hearing of the four men.

Cautiously he moved close to the door.

His intention was to unlock it, and creep through the kitchen toward the front room of the inn.

But to his dismay he found that it was quite impossible to open the door without causing a great noise.

The bolt and the lock were both old and rusted.

"This seems to settle it," muttered the detective. "If I attempt to get out of here I will have Black Jake by me in a minute. If the bandits see me, I'm lost."

For Carl Greene recollected that he was dressed precisely as he had been when they had last seen him.

But the detective was not easily thwarted.

Looking around the room, he noticed that there was a small window over the bedstead.

Instantly this put an idea into Carl Greene's head.

He resolved to crawl through the window.

In doing so he knew that he was running some risk.

For Black Jake might come at any moment to see that the door was closed.

If he called to his guest there would be no response.

True, he might think the inmate of the room was asleep, and on the other hand he might not.

"Well, I'll be out of the house anyway," said the detective to himself, "and I can run for it if it is necessary."

He got on the bed.

The room was quite low.

So it was an easy matter to reach the window, although it was much nearer the ceiling than the floor.

Making as little noise as possible, Carl Greene opened the window.

Then cautiously he crawled through it.

To his horror, on reaching the window ledge, he found that the side of the house was built upon a precipice.

By the light of the moon he could see that he was on the brink of an awful abyss.

Carl Greene shuddered.

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed, "if I'd dropped as I intended doing, what would my life be worth now?"

For a few moments he sat clinging to the window, quite uncertain how to act.

Then he looked above him.

He saw that the roof of the hut was within reach.

With great care he raised himself from the window ledge.

For he knew that if he slipped he would be dashed to pieces.

Firmly the detective grasped the roof. Then with a terrible effort he drew himself up until his chest rested on the parapet.

For a moment he rested.

But his task was nearly over. Very shortly he found himself on the roof of the building.

Along he crawled, taking care to cause no sound.

For he realized that he might be over the heads of the four men.

At length he saw that the house no longer ran along by the precipice.

So very quietly he dropped to the ground.

Then creeping like a serpent he made his way to the front of the building. All the time he kept as close to the side of the house as possible, so that his shadow might serve to conceal him in case any of the men suddenly appeared.

In this way he got quite close to an open window.

Then, to his intense satisfaction, he discovered that he could hear distinctly the talk that was taking place inside the inn.

CHAPTER XII.

A PLOT TO ROB A BANK.

The detective then set himself down to hear the talk.

"Well, Jesse, you've got the biggest gaul of any man I ever knew."

"How's that Jake?"

"Why thunder! anybody else but you'd have been miles away, but—great Scott! you stay here and show yourself."

"Not exactly show myself, for I don't want to be seen, Jake."

"Why," continued the bandit king, "I'll bet my life that the sheriff is not looking for us within twenty miles of this place!"

"Still, I'd have kept quiet for a few days."

"Couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Had business to attend to."

"Is that so?"

"You bet it is."

"What's on?"

The bandit king made no reply. He looked very cautiously around the room.

"Are we the only people in the building?" he asked.

"No."

"By gosh, you ought to have told us that before," said Jesse James in an alarmed tone.

"There's no danger. The fellow's a jay at the best and he's fast asleep by this time in the room back of the kitchen."

"Go and see."

"There's no occasion."

"But I insist."

"Very well."

Black Jake hurried off through the kitchen.

He stopped at the door of the room in which he imagined his guest was sleeping.

For several moments he listened keenly.

There was not a sound within.

"I'll make sure though," muttered the landlord.

With these words he drew a heavy bolt across the door. This effectually prevented any one inside from coming out. For it was quite impossible to draw back the bolt.

"It's all right Jesse," he said, returning to the bandits. "I've secured the door, so if he wakes up and has a fancy to come out he can't. You can talk as much as you like now without danger."

"We can't stay here very long, Jake."

"How's that?"

"We've got to meet a man tonight."

"What about?"

"Well, from what we can learn, we think there is a barrel of money in the business."

"I hope so."

"We can't fail," said Jim Cummins. "I heard of the chance and put Jesse on the trail; it's a real good thing."

"Can't you tell me more about it?"

"Well, we don't know a great deal ourselves yet. Jim knows more than I do," said the bandit king.

"I'll tell you all I know," said Jim Cummins, "for we know you're to be trusted Jake."

"It'll be rather late in the day to begin to doubt me."

"Now I don't mind telling you," said Jim Cummins, "that this is one of the strangest affairs I have ever been in."

"That makes me more anxious to hear all about it."

Carl Greene did not lose a word of this talk.

It may be imagined how keenly he was interested in what was taking place.

"To cut it short," remarked Jim Cummins, "I was riding along toward our retreat this morning when I met an old friend who lives in this town."

"Do I know him?"

"Guess not. He hasn't been here long, Jake. It seemed that he was coming out to see us. This friend of ours is a bit of a crook in his way, and he's pretty well known among that class."

"Go on."

"Well, our friend received a visit a few days ago from a gentleman in that town."

"Who was he?"

"His name I didn't inquire; he was the cashier of the bank."

"Strange company for him to keep!" exclaimed Black Jake. "A bank cashier and a crook don't usually travel together."

"You'll hear the reason for it. The cashier," remarked Jim Cummins, "wanted to make arrangements to have the bank robbed."

"Thunder!"

The statement astonished the landlord.

"Wants to have the bank robbed?" he shouted: "then why doesn't he rob it himself?"

"He has already."

"Jim Cummins?"

"Well?"

"This is a queer yarn you're spinning. You're not getting at me?"

"It's gospel truth. See here, this cashier's short in his cash to the extent of several thousand dollars and he can't find a cent towards making the shortage good. He's gambled it away."

"He's in a tight corner."

"That's so."

"But why in thunder does he wish to have the bank robbed. Hasn't it lost enough to please him?"

"You don't understand."

"There I agree with you Jim. You're going too strong for me."

"It's as plain as daylight. He wants the bank to be robbed. Then out of the proceeds of the robbery his shortage will be made good. That's to be his share of the plunder if he finds it necessary to hand over the stuff."

"I see, and in consideration for this he makes it easy for the bank to be robbed."

"That's how we understand it," said Bob Ford, "but of course we shall know more when we see him."

"Sure."

"This friend of ours thought that we were about the best people to undertake the business."

Black Jake laughed.

"I guess he'd be puzzled to find men who'd do it better. Where have you got to meet this cashier?"

"In the valley down below the river," said Jim Cummins, "about a hundred yards from the bridge near the big tree."

"I know the spot. You'll be able to talk there without being overheard."

"That's true. Hadn't we better go Jesse?"

"What time is it, Jim?"

"It's a quarter of eleven," answered the landlord.

"Gosh! I thought it was much later than that," answered the bandit king. "Why we can drink a lot more of your whiskey, Jake."

"That's right."

"We don't meet the cashier until one o'clock."

"Do I know him?"

"Guess you must have seen him."

"What sort of a fellow is he?"

"He's got a black beard and the same colored hair, about medium height and slight."

"Take care, Jesse."

"Why?"

"Don't be imposed upon."

"There's no fear of that. This fellow'll have a letter from our friend," said the bandit king, "so it is not possible for us to be deceived, is it?"

"Wall, not if he has the letter."

"He'll have it. If he hasn't no business will be done."

"When does this robbery take place?"

"Gosh, Jake, I've told you a dozen times that we don't know more'n you. Why we're going to fix all that tonight."

"And it'll be a big thing."

"Many thousands. Seeing what the object of the robbery is, the cashier'd be a jay to have us there for a few dollars."

"That's so."

The bandits began to get exceedingly lively.

This was the combined effect of the whiskey and the thoughts of the robbery.

Carl Greene had listened to all this talk with keen interest.

The conversation now changed to other topics.

For some time Carl Greene paid attention to what was being said, for he thought it probable that the bandits might return to their original subject.

"Seems they don't mean to speak of it any more," muttered the detective. "The question is what must I do now?"

The detective was very anxious to reach Pine Bluff, for he wanted to secure the dollars mentioned in the writing on the scrap of paper he had in his possession.

But he realized that it was his duty to thwart the designs of the bandits and the rascally cashier against the bank.

But how was it to be done?

"Not by staying here, that's sure," the detective said to himself. "I guess I'll walk along, then I may think of a good plan before long."

He left the neighborhood of the house in the quietest manner. He was quite satisfied that he had not heard a sound that would disturb the people in the inn.

"By Heaven, I'll do it," he exclaimed after he had gone about half a mile.

He was walking down the valley towards the place where Jim Cummins said the meeting between them and the cashier had been appointed.

After going about three miles at his utmost speed, for he had been running hard for some time, Carl Green turned aside from the path through the gulch.

Entering the wood which grew thickly on either side of where he was walking, in a few minutes he stopped before a large tree which grew almost against the rocks which towered above.

Stooping down the detective put his hand into a hole in the trunk of the tree.

It was a hollow tree.
 From the hole he drew forth a bundle.
 "As I left it," he muttered. "Well, it was not likely to have been disturbed. No one could dream of looking there."
 Whilst he was making these remarks he had unfastened the bundle.
 From a mass of objects he selected two.
 One was a wig of black hair. The other was a beard of the same color.
 When they had been affixed to his head and face he looked a different man.
 "He's got a black beard and hair," said Carl Greene: "that's all I know about him. Well, I will have to take my chances. Perhaps by night I may be able to get through with it."
 He folded his bundle up again and returned it to the hiding place in the trunk of the tree.
 Then he got onto the path again, and at a fast run continued on his way.
 At length he came to the tree beneath which the meeting was to take place.
 He recognized it from the description given by Jim Cummins.
 Ahead of him he could see the river and the bridge over it.
 "This is the spot," he said to himself, "but it won't do for me to stay here. No, I'll have to get along. He's sure to come by the road from the town, and there's only one so I don't see how it's possible to miss him."
 Carl Greene went on at the same pace.
 He crossed the bridge. By doing so he reached the road that led to the town.
 It was on this road that he hoped to fall in with the cashier.
 "But I mustn't meet him too near here," he reflected, "or they'll hear me."
 The detective was quite half a mile from the bridge when he stopped, thinking he had traveled far enough for his purpose.
 The road at this point was narrow.
 It was not especially dark except at the sides. Here trees overhung the way and beneath them it was impossible to distinguish any object.
 So Carl Greene took up his position beneath the overhanging branches.
 He was quite near the center of the road, and at the same time was completely hidden from view.
 Eagerly he listened for the sounds that would announce some one's approach.

CHAPTER XIII.

CARL GREENE HOLDS UP THE BANK CASHIER.

It was not long that Carl Greene had to wait.
 He heard in the distance the noise of a horse's hoofs striking on the hard road.
 "I reckon that's the man," reflected Carl Greene, "for it's not very likely that there'll be anybody else but the bandits and him about at this time of night."
 The detective grasped his six-shooter.
 The horseman was getting very near.
 When he was within two or three yards of Carl Greene, the detective sprang right out into the middle of the road.
 In his hand he had his pistol.
 This he pointed straight at the head of the stranger.
 "I hope I don't alarm you," said the detective, speaking in distinct but low tones.
 It was clear that the stranger was very much disturbed in his mind.
 He made no attempt to proceed; seeing the pistol close to his head, he instantly reined in his horse.
 His face was usually white, but now it was even more pallid than usual.
 "I guess if you got off that horse we'd get along better," said Carl Greene, "but first of all I'll take any toys of this kind that you happen to have about you."
 The detective indicated by a flourish of his pistol what he meant.
 The man dismounted.
 He seemed dazed.
 Carl Greene led him to a bank beneath the trees.
 "Sit here," he said, pointing to the ground. "Now we'll talk."
 The detective stood immediately in front of the stranger, who was now sitting down.
 Covered by Carl Greene's pistol, he had no possible chance of getting away.
 But by this time the man was gradually recovering his faculties.

He began to think that he had fallen in with one of the bandits, and that his captor would lead him to where Jesse was waiting.
 "Yes, this must be it," he said. "I'm in no danger."
 Carl Greene was thinking how he should open the conversation.
 He felt that he had made no mistake.
 The man was of medium height with black hair and whiskers. It was therefore almost a certainty that he was the cashier who was to meet the bandits.
 Besides he had the appearance of a man holding such a position.
 "I didn't expect to meet you here."
 "You bet you didn't," answered Carl Greene, "but I expected to meet you and what I expect generally happens."
 "Who are you?"
 "That's my business."
 "Can't you say anything to give me some clew?"
 "Not a word."
 The stranger gazed long and keenly at his captor through the gloom that encircled both men.
 By the faint light he saw, to his amazement, that the man with the pistol was his double.
 He was thunderstruck.
 The knowledge terrified him.
 What could it mean?
 He was not left long in doubt.
 Carl Greene had little time to spare. It was necessary for him to get to business without loss of time.
 "Mister!"
 "Yes," answered the stranger.
 "I guess I'm about the last person in the world you wanted to meet."
 "How's that?"
 "Because I'm Carl Greene, the detective."
 The effect of this announcement was terrifying.
 The cashier, for of course it was he, was horrified. He actually shook with fear.
 But the thought of the dreadful position he was in shot through his mind.
 He nerved himself to face this terrible foe.
 "You can't give me that," he answered, "I know Carl Greene very well."
 "Really," laughed the detective, "what a pity that Carl Greene's hitherto been spared the pleasure of knowing you. But it's not too late to remedy that."
 Then the detective resumed:
 "Now, mister, shall I tell you who you are?"
 "If you like, it doesn't interest me."
 "You're the cashier at the bank in town."
 The stranger laughed.
 "What a wonderful mind reader you must be," he said with a sneer. "Considering that the whole neighborhood does business with me at the bank, your penetration is quite remarkable."
 "You'll say so in different tones in a minute," said Carl Greene sternly. "I'll tell you something more."
 "Fifty if you like, but you won't convince me even then that you are Carl Greene," said the cashier with a smile.
 He was beginning to think that the man was playing a game of bluff.
 "Listen," said Carl Greene looking the man straight in the face and getting closer to him.
 "I am."
 "I want that letter you've got in your pocket."
 The effect of this speech was electrical.
 All the bravado that the cashier had exhibited disappeared for a few moments.
 Speechless, with eyes wide open, he stared at his captor.
 By dint of hard struggle he managed to recover himself.
 "What letter," he asked in a tone which was meant to be defiant.
 "There is not the slightest occasion for me to explain. You know well enough what letter I'm referring to."
 "Really," sneered the cashier, "you're giving me credit for greater powers than I possess. I assure you positively that I do not know what you mean."
 "And I tell you positively," said Carl Greene, sternly, "that you lie."
 The cashier's face grew livid with passion.
 He would have sprung on his assailant if it had not been for the six-shooter the man held in his hand.
 "Don't try it," said Carl Greene. "You can't deceive me," he added. "I want that letter to Jesse James given to you by a mutual friend in the town."
 At last the cashier collapsed.
 He could not now even utter a denial.
 "I thought I'd astonish you a bit. Come, hand it over, or I'll have to take it."

The unfortunate cashier could not refuse.

Even now he hoped that this man was an emissary of the bandits.

For he did not believe that his captor was Carl Greene.

"You see I know all about you," said the detective. "I don't need to even open the letter to tell you what it contains. I'll give you a sample of my skill."

Carl Greene held up the unopened letter.

"Now I'm not going to give it to you word for word, but you shall have the purport of it. Listen."

Fixing his eyes on the cashier the detective spoke slowly:

"This is what the letter says. It is addressed to Jesse James, and it introduces him to the cashier of the bank in this town. He's a nice cashier, too," laughed Carl Greene. "I'd like him to keep the cash for me."

The cashier was in agony whilst this talk was going on.

He never said a word.

"Well, this cashier's robbed his bank," said Carl Greene.

The man half rose to his feet.

"Don't move. It's an ugly word, but it's the only one I can use. Well, mister, he doesn't want to be found out so he goes to a crook he knows. This crook tells him he knows somebody who will rob the bank."

The detective stopped to note the effect of his words.

The man had an amazed look on his face.

He was still staring hard at Carl Greene.

"It's a clever scheme. The bank's to be robbed," continued Carl Greene, "by your aid. Then your shortage is to be accounted for. Don't you think I'm pretty good as a mind reader, eh?"

The cashier was thunderstruck. He no longer doubted that it was Carl Greene, the famous detective who stood in front of him.

He realized how exceedingly small his chances of escape were.

The door of the jail loomed wide open before him.

He could see no way of avoiding it.

What was it to deny anything to this terrible opponent?

"I'll make a clean breast of it," he gasped, "if you'll give me a chance to get away."

"Get away! Not much! I'll keep a pretty good grip on you mister. Besides there's no necessity for you telling me anything. I know all I want to know. What I don't know I shall presently learn from Jesse James."

At this remark the cashier again exhibited great surprise.

"What! don't you think I'll have the courage to meet the bandit king? He'll take me for the cashier who robbed the bank, and wants to rob it again. We'll have fun I tell you."

The detective knew that it was not wise to linger longer.

He suspected that already the hour of meeting had arrived, and he concluded that the bandits would not be surprised if the man they were to meet would be somewhat late.

"You'll have to walk up there."

Carl Green pointed as he spoke to a high bank behind his prisoner.

The man turned mechanically and made his way up the incline, followed by the detective, still with the pistol in his hand.

Having taken the man amidst the trees that grew densely here, to one of these trees the detective bound his prisoner.

"I am going to leave you here," he said, "and I hope that you will make yourself as happy as you can. In case you don't reach the bank tomorrow morning in time for business," laughed Carl Greene, "don't worry. I'm the cashier now. I'll take your place, and the bank'll like it better."

The cashier never said a word.

He still hoped that he would be able to escape after the departure of this terrible detective.

He expected that some one would pass and that then he would call out and obtain his release.

But when he found himself gagged all hope fled. He realized now that he was completely beaten.

Carl Green was very careful to see that the ropes that bound the man to the tree were securely tied. Also that the handkerchief which gagged the man could not possibly slip off his mouth.

For the entire success of the scheme depended upon the cashier not having any communication with the bandits.

The detective was satisfied that he had now neglected nothing. With a light heart, notwithstanding the peril in which he was about to place himself, Carl Greene went down the bank into the road.

Then, without wasting time, he mounted the horse of the cashier.

"Bought with the bank money," said Carl Greene with a laugh, "and not a bad horse, either. He can go unless I'm much mistaken."

Touching the animal with a twig he had in his hand he found the horse dash off at a great pace.

Having only half a mile to go he soon arrived at the bridge over the river.

Across it he went, glancing keenly ahead of him.

In the valley he saw dimly the forms of three men.

Towards them he rode.

But he stopped dead when a loud voice cried, "Halt!"

CHAPTER XIV.

CARL GREENE INTERVIEWS THE BANDITS.

Jesse James was the speaker.

"Who are you?" he shouted.

"From the bank," answered Carl Green after a momentary hesitation.

Until this instant it had never occurred to him that there might have been some prearranged signal.

But if so, he presumed that it would have been mentioned at the talk that took place at the inn.

Until he heard Jesse James reply he was in considerable fear.

"From the bank," answered the bandit king with a laugh, "we're always glad to meet anyone from there. Ride this way, mister, we'll have a talk."

Carl Greene had passed the first ordeal well enough.

He had now to face the bandits at close quarters.

He trusted to the gloom that prevailed to go through it safely. It was evident that he was made up to resemble the cashier to some degree, for the likeness had startled the cashier himself.

"You'd better hitch your horses up," said Bob Ford, "for we'll be some time getting through this business."

"You bet," said Jim Cummins.

Carl Greene dismounted.

He hitched his horse up to a tree.

Then standing under the shadow of the big tree, where the meeting had been arranged to take place, the detective was submitted to a long and careful scrutiny.

Each of the three bandits thrust his face almost into that of the detective and perused his features keenly.

"Where's the letter," asked Jesse sharply.

"Here it is."

"Give it to me."

"Take it."

Jesse James tore open the envelope.

"You'll have trouble to read it mister," said Carl Greene.

"Not with the help of this lantern," cried Jim Cummins suddenly flashing a brilliant light on the scene.

Carl Greene felt uncomfortable.

Once more by the powerful light of the lantern the bandits looked hard at the detective.

Evidently the inspection was satisfactory to them.

It was clear that they had no idea that their mortal enemy, Carl Greene was with them.

The bandit king glanced through the letter.

"Read it out, Jess," said Bob Ford.

"All right, here goes."

He read as follows:

"The bearer of this is the cashier at the national bank in this town. He's the man I spoke to you about and he wants the business carried through quick."

"You can trust him thoroughly, for he's too deep in the mud himself to turn traitor."

"Mike."

"That's his writing sure enough," said the bandit king. "What do you think, Bob?"

Bob Ford took the letter and carefully examined the handwriting.

"There's no doubt about it, Jesse," he said. "Here, Jim, what do you say?"

"It's Mike's writing."

"Now, mister," said the bandit king, "we're ready to talk."

"So am I."

"We understand that you're anxious to have the bank robbed."

"That is so."

"And that being the cashier of it, you'll be able to give us valuable help?"

"Sure, it couldn't be done without my assistance."

"Well, I am not so sure of that, are you boys?"

"Guess not," answered Jim Cummins. "We've got a habit, mister, of riding into a town and paying a visit to the bank whenever we take it into our heads to do so."

"You'd do no good at our bank. It would be an impossibility. We're too careful."

The bandit king had made it appear that the other man's assistance was not at all important. At the same time, he knew it was

for the bandits had long since abandoned the idea of robbing this particular bank in the way suggested by Jim Cummins.

"Before I go into this business," said the bandit king, "I want to make sure of one thing."

"What is it?"

"This. Is there enough money in this affair to make it worth our while to take it up, that's the question?"

"And one very easily answered," said Carl Greene. "Would fifty thousand dollars tempt you?"

"Fifty thousand dollars," shouted the three bandits together.

The sum named far exceeded their expectations.

"Yes, fifty thousand dollars can be obtained," continued Carl Greene, "if this affair's managed properly."

"Mister."

"Yes, Jesse James."

"You're not bluffing?"

"You'd better not try to get at us," said Bob Ford sternly.

"I'm talking business," said Carl Greene calmly.

"You asked me whether the affair was worth taking up and I told you that there was fifty thousand dollars in it."

"You mean that there'll be that sum in the bank?"

"Yes."

"And we can get it?"

"It'll be your own fault if you don't."

The bandit king did not reply for a moment.

"Jesse James!"

"Yes, mister."

"There's one thing I forgot."

"What is it?"

"I want ten thousand out of what you make."

"How's that?"

"I thought Mike had explained."

"He said something about you're having to make good a shortage. But I didn't imagine that you wanted so much."

"You forgot that I've got to give Mike a divvy out of this."

"That's only fair," said the bandit king after a moment's hesitation. "Say no more about it, we'll be satisfied with forty thousand."

"And you shall have it," said Carl Greene; "it's a cinch."

"We'll settle the preliminaries. Now fix up a scheme," said the bandit king. "I've been thinking one out on the way over."

"Good."

"It may want to be altered. I don't say it's perfect."

"Let's hear it. We'll see what can be done."

"And if we can't fix it," said Bob Ford, "I guess that you will travel a good many miles before you meet with anybody that can."

"You're the only people I'd work with," said Carl Greene.

"Why?"

"Hurry up!" cried Jesse.

The bandit king was becoming impatient.

"First I want to know how many of you want to be in this," said Carl Greene.

"Why?"

"Because my plan depends upon your answer to some extent."

The bandits had discussed this very matter before the cashier had arrived.

They decided that not less than four of the bandits would enter the bank in case it was needful.

They imagined that these four men would be able to get out in case of surprise.

"We think four will be enough."

"Four! That will suit me well," said Carl Greene. "How about the others?"

"We'll arrange to have them near."

"Good."

"When do you propose that this robbery shall take place?"

"How'll tomorrow night suit you, Jess?"

"That'll do very well, I never like to keep things about."

"I'm glad of that. It's mighty important for me. If I don't put my account straight by the first of the month, the fraud will be found out. Besides, tomorrow night there'll be a lot of money in the bank, may be more than the sum I named, for there are several big deposits to be named tomorrow."

"The safe's downstairs?"

"You seem to know something about the internal arrangements of the bank," laughed Carl Greene.

"I don't lose sight of much."

"I'll have to procure admission for you to the bank premises."

"That's absolutely necessary."

"Once in there will not be any trouble. I've got keys that will unlock the strong room where the money is."

"Still, we must do something to make people think that there's been a gang of robbers in the place."

Sure. Drill some holes in the door and explode some dynamite after we've got the money."

The bandits laughed heartily at this.

They saw that the cashier was a business man. There was no doubt in their minds that the thing would go through.

"Where shall we meet you?"

This question of Jesse James' was one that Carl Greene knew must necessarily be put.

He had been turning the matter over in his mind for some time.

And he had found it difficult to hit upon a meeting place.

He knew the town well. But he had no idea concerning the way in which the bank and the buildings connected with it were constructed.

"I reckon I'd better meet you on the outskirts of the town," said Carl Greene; "then I'll take you along. By tomorrow night I'll have everything fixed."

"Where shall we find you?"

"You know the old mill, about half a mile out of the town?"

"Yes."

"I'll be there."

"What time?"

"Eleven o'clock."

"Think that's early enough?"

"Quite."

"Then everything's arranged."

"Except what I've got to do."

"We shall bring the whole of the band with us," said the bandit king; "there may be work for all of them. You can never tell."

"You can never tell," echoed Carl Greene.

He could hardly refrain from laughing.

"Say," said Jesse James suddenly.

"Well."

"You've forgotten one thing."

"What's that?"

"How'll you be dressed tomorrow?"

"Why, like I am now."

"That won't do."

"Why not?"

"Because you'll be done for if you're seen with us."

"Great Scott! you're right. I see you're an older hand at this business than me. I can't alter my beard and hair, but I'll wear different clothes, that's all I can do."

"We'd better arrange a signal so that there can't be any possibility of mistake."

"Sure. The password is 'fifty thousand dollars.'"

"Fifty thousand dollars," laughed the three bandits.

They walked toward their horses, and unhitching them, they rode away.

The bandits returned to the cave, which was their hiding place.

Carl Greene remained lost in thought for a few minutes.

Then he got into the saddle and galloped away.

CHAPTER XV.

CARL GREENE MATURES HIS SCHEME FOR CAPTURING THE BANDITS.

The news that the bandits brought to their comrades was acceptable.

The prospect of the certainty of landing fifty thousand dollars put all the men into good humor.

"Mike's a trump!" cried Jim Cummins.

"You bet."

"Tomorrow night, Jesse?"

"Yes, Ed."

"Gosh! wish it was tonight. It's so long since I've seen a dollar that I don't like this wait a little bit."

All next day the bandits were extremely restless.

They could settle to nothing.

For their minds were full of the great scheme of robbery that had been arranged.

What made this delay the more irksome was that the bandits had to remain in the cave the whole time.

They did not think it prudent to run any risk.

If they ventured out they might be seen.

The next night at nine o'clock the whole of the bandits mounted their horses preparatory to starting for the scene of their operations.

"Now, be sure we haven't forgotten anything," said Jesse James.

"I've got the dynamite cartridges."

"And I've got the drills."

"Don't forget a lantern," said Frank James, "we want one."

"I've one," shouted Bob Ford.

"Then we'll start, boys," said the bandit king, "now you all know where the meeting place is?"

"At the old mill about half a mile out of town."

"That's so. Make your way there how you can. Don't keep together. Don't be a minute later than eleven."

"Right!"

Jesse James touched Siroc with the spur.

The gallant black bounded forward.

The steed seemed to possess some of the excitement that animated its rider.

It was at a great pace that he covered the ground.

The bandit king was alone.

He found that if he allowed Siroc to go at his own pace he would reach the meeting place much too soon.

"It won't be well to wait too long," he muttered.

So he checked the animal and henceforth traveled slowly.

Carl Greene had ridden right into the town.

The detective was in an embarrassing position.

He was extremely anxious to go over to Pine Bluff.

For he wanted very much to investigate the affair.

But it was quite out of the question to leave whilst there was a chance of capturing the whole of the bandits at one stroke.

And during the day the detective had no time to attend to anything but the business immediately on hand.

It was necessary for him to carefully inspect the bank building.

He also made a careful inspection of all the approaches to the bank both at the front and in the rear.

Carl Greene had made up his mind on this occasion to capture the bandits single handed.

Many times his schemes had been frustrated by the blundering of the sheriff.

"This time it won't occur," he muttered. "I'll play this hand alone. If I fail, I've no one to blame but myself."

The detective did not fail to recollect that if he succeeded his triumph would be all the greater.

His plan, broadly speaking, was to entrap the bandits in some place where he could securely lock them in, and from which they would have no possibility of making their escape.

This done, he would summon the sheriff and astound him with the news.

But it was absolutely necessary for him to see one of the officials of the bank.

He reflected some time as to what excuse he should offer for his visit.

For he had no idea of letting the bank authorities know that the James Boys intended robbing them that evening.

In the afternoon, whilst he was walking from the hotel at which he had been staying, towards the bank, an idea occurred to him.

He had a smile on his face as he entered the bank and asked to see the president.

"He's busy."

"Very likely, but he'll see me."

The clerk looked Carl Greene up and down.

He judged the detective by the clothes he was wearing.

Reckoned this way he did not amount to much, for he had on the same clothes that he had worn for the two preceding days.

And they were soiled badly.

"See you," said the clerk with somewhat of a sneer on his face, "I guess not."

"But you'll take this to him," said the detective sharply.

As he spoke he scribbled a few lines on a piece of paper.

Taking an envelope from his pocket, he enclosed the note to the president.

"Thought he was a peddler," muttered the clerk. "Guess he's only a crank, I'll humor him."

With the note in his hand the clerk entered the room in which the president was doing business.

"You, sir."

The official opened it.

Rapidly he glanced over the contents.

Then he sprang from his chair with great alacrity.

"I'll see him at once," he cried, "where is he?"

The clerk was too astonished to speak.

"Outside," he stammered at length.

The president hurried out.

"Come in this room," he cried, "I'm glad to see you."

The clerk felt completely crushed as he saw the president and the stranger disappear into a room that was used on rare occasions only, and those important ones.

"So you're in these parts again, Mr. Greene?"

"Yes."

"It's the first time I've met you since the important service you rendered this bank three years ago."

"And I'm here to do something more for you."

"For us?"

"Certainly; how's the cashier?" asked Carl Greene abruptly.

"The cashier!" echoed the president in a tone that was full of surprise.

"He's not well, he's absent from business today. He told me yesterday that he felt sick, and asked to be allowed to spend the day resting at his house."

"That's what he said?"

"That's the truth."

"Send up to his house and see."

"There's no occasion to do so."

"But I beg that you will."

"If you insist, Mr. Greene," said the president coldly, "I will do so, but I think it will be an unnecessary trouble."

The president wrote a note hurriedly.

"Take this to the cashier's and ask for an answer," he said to the messenger, "and don't loiter."

"I'll be back in ten minutes."

Carl Greene and the president, during the messenger's absence, conversed on various topics.

The detective would not resume the line of talk he first started until the messenger came back.

As soon as he did so he was shown into the presence of the president.

"The cashier went away yesterday and has not returned," he said.

"Are you making no mistake?"

"None."

"Who did you give the letter to?"

"His housekeeper. She seemed much alarmed at her employer's absence."

"That will do. You may go."

Once more the detective and the president were alone.

"What does this mean?" asked the latter in an alarmed tone.

"It means that the cashier is a man not to be trusted."

"I cannot believe that. He has my fullest confidence."

"Still it is true."

"Mr. Greene!"

"Yes."

"If anyone but you talked that way I should dismiss it as idle. With you it is different. Speak frankly and tell me on what you ground your suspicions."

"I cannot tell you all now. There are reasons."

"Then I won't force you; I trust you."

"Thank you. I will not abuse your confidence. I have a request to make."

"Go on."

"I wish to remain in the bank tonight."

"That's strange."

"I knew you'd think so, especially as I cannot give any reason, but I must do it. It is absolutely necessary."

"Has it any connection with the cashier?"

"Yes."

"I will see that you are allowed to stay here during the night."

"I wish to have the means of entering and leaving when I please."

"These keys will secure you that. This opens the back door. This the front. Take them."

"Thank you," said the detective as he put the two keys in his pocket.

"Mr. Greene!"

"Yes."

"Are you intending to remain here alone?"

"Yes."

"You're sure you wouldn't like me to stay with you?"

"Quite sure. I have reasons for not wishing to have any associates."

"Very well. You're the best judge. I shouldn't presume to dictate, but I shall feel very anxious until I see you again tomorrow morning."

"I hope to be of great service to you, but I regret I cannot speak more explicitly now."

The interview ended.

The president was left to ponder over what had taken place and to muse on what reasons there were for suspecting the cashier of having done anything wrong.

Carl Greene proceeded to his hotel.

There he stayed until evening.

He sat in his room. For he did not wish to be seen.

At ten o'clock he proceeded to make his preparations for the important business that he had on hand.

He carefully adjusted to his head and face the black wig and false beard of the same color that he had worn on the preceding evening.

Then he colored those portions of his face that were not covered by the whiskers, with a material that gave him a dark-brown hue, as if he had been exposed to the sun and wind.

This was the very opposite to the appearance of the cashier.

The bank official had an extremely pale face.

"The bandit'll think I have not done badly for a beginner," he said to himself with a laugh, as he looked at himself in the mirror and wrapped around himself a heavy scarf.

When he had completed his toilet he looked utterly unlike the cashier.

Only the hair and whiskers remained to give any resemblance to him.

He affixed a large sombrero on his head.

His whole appearance now was that of a farmer.

"I've just got time to walk over to the mill," he said.

With these words he left the hotel.

His horse—that is, the horse he had taken from the cashier—he had placed near the bank so as to be within easy reach when needed.

Then pondering over the daring schemes he had framed, Carl Greene walked through the darkness to the old mill.

CHAPTER XVI.

CLELL MILLER FREES THE CASHIER.

The bandits had all arrived at the mill with one exception.

That exception was Clell Miller.

His absence was inexplicable.

For he had left the cave at the same time as the others and he had consequently ample time to reach the rendezvous.

"I can't understand it," said Jesse James. "Let's hope he hasn't fallen in with Carl Greene."

"If he has I hope he'll fall out again."

"It's no joking matter, boys," said Jesse James sternly, "Clell's not the kind of man to be absent without good cause."

It was clearly of no use to discuss any further what had happened to their comrade.

It will be better for the reader to follow his track and see.

As was before stated, Clell Miller left the cave with the rest.

But unlike the others he had stopped a few minutes for refreshment at Black Jake's.

"So you're off on this bank business, Clell," said the landlord.

"Yes, that's our game."

"Well, I hope you'll have luck."

"We want it. We don't want to be beaten all the time!"

"Talking of being beaten, there was a cuss here last night who beat me out of his night's lodging and money he owed for his supper."

"Gosh! that doesn't happen to you often, Jake, how did he manage it?"

"Got out of his room by the window at the side. Then crawled along the roof. I wonder that he wasn't killed. Say."

"Well."

"Tell Jesse this if he'll feel interested. He was here last night."

"I will."

"Have another drink."

"Well, just one, and then I must go or I reckon I will be late."

Clell Miller had stopped longer than he had imagined.

The talk had made the time fly.

He realized now that, ride as hard as he might, he would yet be unable to reach the old mill at the appointed time.

"Curse it! Jesse'll think I've fought shy of this business," he said inwardly.

Madly he urged his horse along.

But at length he slackened his speed when he saw how hopeless it would be to get to the place by eleven o'clock.

Whilst he was riding up a rather steep hill, thickly shaded by the overhanging branches of the trees that grew on either side, he suddenly stopped.

"Help! help!" he heard a voice cry.

The bandit and his horse remained motionless in the road.

He listened intently.

"Help! help!"

The words rang out on the stillness of the air despite the low tone in which they were uttered.

"It's evident the cuss is near, whoever he is," muttered Clell Miller. "Don't see why I should waste any time on him, though. I won't get paid for it."

The bandit was about to ride on when an idea occurred to him.

"Why shouldn't I do a bit of business on my own account," he said, "I'm too late to work with the others? Maybe I can make a few dollars by going through this chap."

The bandit dismounted.

Leisurely he hitched his horse.

All this time the cries still continued.

From the tone of voice in which they were uttered it would seem that the speaker was weak and faint.

"Up here, I reckon," muttered Clell Miller.

Saying this, he strode up a rather steep bank.

It was quite dark, and although the moon was shining above, it did not assist the bandit.

For the thick trees prevented it from aiding by its light.

But Clell Miller was guided by the cries.

Through the bushes he went.

At length he came to a fairly open space.

Then to his amazement he saw a man bound to a tree.

The wretched creature looked as if he had but little life left in him.

His face was deathly pale and his eyes seemed to be starting from their sockets.

For a minute or two the bandit gazed at this strange spectacle.

"Guess the best thing I can do," he said, "is to cut the rope and let him loose. I will."

Drawing a knife from his pocket he instantly severed the cords that held the man to the tree.

Immediately he was loosened, the captive fell forward on the grass.

This is not surprising. Evidently he was completely numbed.

Clell Miller had brought a bottle of whiskey in his pocket. He had filled it at Black Jake's.

Bending down, he held it to the lips of the prostrate man. Down his throat he poured a large quantity of the fiery fluid.

The man gasped for breath. But the spirits revived him. In a few minutes he seemed to be tolerably lively.

"Who in thunder are you, anyway," shouted Clell Miller.

"My name's of no consequence," said the man in quiet tones.

"Then perhaps you'll tell me how long you have been here?"

"About twenty-four hours."

"Great Heaven! it's a wonder you're alive. Why didn't you shout before. In the day time many people pass."

"That's true, but I had no chance."

"How was that?"

"I was gagged. The handkerchief that went across my mouth only slipped off a few minutes ago."

"Now, mister, I want to ask you a question."

"Go on."

"D'you know who it was that robbed you?"

"I wasn't robbed."

"Not robbed!" cried Clell Miller, "then, by gosh, the man must have some grudge against you to leave you in this state."

"He had no particular spite against me. Don't think he'd ever seen me before last night. And, by Heaven! I don't want to see him again."

"You'll recollect him?"

"You bet. One sight of Carl Greene's all I want. I'm not a hog."

Clell Miller was astounded.

"Say that again," he stammered.

"I was talking of Carl Greene. He is the man who left me in this condition."

"How d'yo know?"

"He told me so."

"Why didn't you kill him? Curse it! The fellow always escapes. He's a demon, but say?"

"Well."

"You haven't told me what reason Carl Greene had for behaving in this manner."

"And I don't know that I will. You see, mister, I don't mean any offense, but you're a complete stranger to me."

"I'm not afraid to tell you who I am," said the stranger. "I generally know how to take care of myself. We all do to one of the James Boys."

It was now the turn of the stranger to exhibit surprise.

"Of the James Boys," he said. "Why I was on the way to see them last night when I was held up and treated in this manner."

Clell Miller was excited by his speech.

"And you did not see Jesse James," he added in a coarse voice.

"No."

"Then who in the name of Heaven did? For some one saw Jesse last night."

"It was Carl Greene."

This last announcement completely took the bandit's breath away.

"Then you're the cashier of the bank, I suppose?"

"I was up till yesterday, but I guess that I'll never go back there again."

Rapidly he related what had happened the previous night.

It was entirely evident from this that Carl Greene was aware of what the bandits intended doing.

The awful nature of the position dawned upon Clell Miller. He saw clearly now that Carl Greene had trapped the bandits. The prospect was terrible. Perhaps by now the detective had them in his power. "You've no doubt that it was Carl Greene?" asked Clell Miller. "None. Have you?" "Curse it, no. I'm going to leave you my friend. I advise you to make tracks. You may get away if you do." "I'll try." "I'm going to ride hard to try to put my comrades on their trail. Good night." Instantly Clell Miller disappeared amid the trees. He ran down the bank. Then he mounted his horse and rode off at a terrific pace. For he knew what depended upon his actions. Meanwhile Carl Greene had arrived at the old mill. He was there at eleven o'clock to the minute. "You never find me late," he said. "I'm generally about when I am wanted and sometimes when I am not," he added under his breath. Jesse James looked at him. "You'll do," he muttered. "Guess you'll make a good crook yet." "Why'd you say that?" "Because your make-up is grand. Only a genius could do what you've done without removing your beard." "Glad you like it." "Everything ready?" "Yes." "What have we got to do?" "Come with me." "Where?" "I'm going right into the town." "The boys to go with you?" "No," said Carl Greene, "there's no place for them." "But I want them to be on hand," said the bandit king. "Why?" "I don't care to take chances." "There are no chances about this. It's a certainty." "That may be, but if I go the boys will go to. That's all I've got to say, mister. I don't doubt you and feel dead sure we'll succeed; but in case we don't it's just as well to have them all on hand." "I can't take more than four of you into the bank." "That's all I want." "Then p'haps I can manage it." Carl Greene saw that Jesse James was obstinate. He felt that if he had four of the leaders of the bandits in his power, he could afford to let the others go. "Place them somewhere near the bank," said the bandit king, "that's all I want." "I'll do that." "Good." "Who's going into the bank?" "Myself, Frank, Bob Ford and Jim Cummins." "Very well; we'd better start." The bandits were about to mount their horses. "You must walk," cried the detective. "Is that necessary?" "Absolutely." Jesse did not much like leaving the animals so far away from the scene of operations. But he saw that there was considerable danger in riding into the town. Reluctantly he submitted. Then, avoiding the road, the party started for town.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BANDITS IN THE TREASURE VAULT OF THE BANK.

The detective had made his arrangements. Some distance from the bank, at the rear of it, was a barn. "This is the best place for the boys to stay," he said. "I think it will do," replied Jesse James, after glancing around. "That's the bank over there, isn't it?" "Yes." "Then it's near enough." "Quite." "If we called for help, they could hear." "There's no doubt of that, Jesse," said Bob Ford. "It's so quiet," added Frank James, "that the least sound would be directly heard."

"That's the road?" "Yes." "Keep a good look out for Clell, boys," "Don't worry about that, Jesse," said Ed Kelly. "He won't pass without our seeing him." Four bandits went toward the bank with Carl Greene. The others—seven in number—stayed near the barn. Here they were quite safe from observation. Beside, it was very improbable that any one would be about at so late an hour. At the rear of the bank was a yard. There was a high fence around it. A gate, which was locked, prevented access to the bank premises. Carl Greene took a key from his pocket. Cautiously he unfastened the gate. "Hush! don't make a sound now," he said in a whisper. The bandits nodded assent. They understood as well as he did the importance of being silent. Noiselessly the feet of the five men fell on the path, as they made their way through the yard up to the house. "There's another door to open," said the detective, "after that there's no chance of our being seen." "But doesn't anyone live in the bank?" "Yes, a watchman." "He may wake." "Oh! watchmen are always asleep," laughed Carl Greene. "Anyway this one will be, for I fixed up a drink for him an hour ago." "By gosh! you forgot nothing." "You'll say that, Jesse James, when we're through." By this time the five men were on the bank premises. The door was closed behind them. Carl Greene produced a lantern. "Follow me," he said. "Say!" "Well, Jesse?" "Have you got the key of the safe?" "Yes." "Then it'll be smooth sailing." "Sure." "There'll be the safe-blowing business to go through." "Yes, that must be done." The bandits followed Carl Greene. He led them through the outer office of the bank. "Here's where the money's kept," he said, pointing to an iron door which was imbedded in the wall. "This room is lined entirely with iron. If you get in it, you've still got your work before you, for there's a safe inside." Whilst he was talking this way, Carl Greene had unfastened the door to the strong room. Inside all was dark. "This way," said the detective. The four bandits entered. By the light of the lantern they could see the safe. "How much is in there?" said Jesse James. "Not less than sixty thousand dollars in bills and coin, as much more of securities. But they're no good to us." Carl Greene set the lantern down on the floor. "Let's go to work," said the bandit king. "Yes, you'd better," replied the detective. "We're waiting for you." "You forgot you've got to blow open the safe. You'd better do that first. There's no object in my opening the safe until you're ready." "That's so. Here, Jim, get at it." Jim Cummins produced two powerful drills made of highly tempered metal. He and Bob Ford set to work at once. They had a tedious task before them, but both men were adepts at this kind of work. They made rapid progress. Carl Greene watched them for some time. "Say!" "Well," said the bandit king. "I'll be back in a minute." "Where're you going?" "I want to have a look at the watchman. In case the drug I gave him doesn't act, I must fix him somehow. There's too big money depending upon this to warrant us taking any chances." "I think you're right." "And I'll draw the door to, so that by no possibility can the light be seen inside." "Sure." "Don't blow the safe until I return." "We shan't be ready," replied Bob Ford. "Of course not."

The detective left the room.
 As he did so he pulled the heavy iron door together.
 It locked noiselessly.
 "At last I've got them," exclaimed Carl Green in a tone of triumph.
 The bandits were prisoners.
 The detective felt that at last he had won.
 He saw no possibility of escape for the desperadoes.
 "Now, I'll go and see the sheriff. He'll have the surprise of his life!"

Before following Carl Greene's steps let us see what had happened outside the building.

The seven bandits had remained at the barn. They had remained keenly on the alert.

Not a sound escaped their ears.

At length they heard in the distance the loud noise caused by a horse, which was evidently coming along the road at full speed.

As it came nearer they could tell that the animal was being ridden furiously.

"It's Clell for millions," shouted Ed Kelly.

"It must be," said Wood Hite. "No one else would be along here at this hour."

"I'll go out to the road and see."

"Do."

Ed Kelly hurried over to the road.

He awaited the horseman's approach, but he did not have long to wait.

"Clell," he shouted as the man got nearer.

Instantly the rider reined in his horse.

"That you, Ed," he said.

"Yes."

"Where are the boys?"

"Over here."

"I'll come along."

Clell Miller—for he was the horseman—dismounted. He led his horse over to the barn.

Hastily he looked around.

"Where are the others," he cried in a voice full of anxiety.

"In the bank of course; you're darned late," said Ed Kelly.

"In the bank!" gasped Clell Miller. "Great Heaven! they're lost."

"Lost!" laughed Ed Kelly, "not on your life! They'll find their way out again. They've got the cashier with them."

"Boys, this is an awful business," said Clell Miller in earnest tones; "the man that took them into the bank is no cashier at all! He is Carl Greene!"

"Carl Greene," they exclaimed in horrified accents.

"It can't be."

"I tell you it is, Ed."

Quickly Clell Miller told his story. He narrated the finding of the cashier and the story told him by the man he had released from the tree to which Carl Greene had tied him.

"Then it's all a plant!" cried Ed Kelly fiercely.

"Yes, Carl Greene's taken the place of the cashier."

The bandits were frantic.

Things looked terribly black for their four comrades who were in the bank with the detective.

But the men outside had no intention of abandoning the men inside the bank.

"We must fight hard, boys."

"But how?"

"We must get in the bank and release Jesse and the others."

"Get in the bank. Guess it can't be done."

"Not without trying."

"We're only wasting time," said Ed Kelly, "let's make a dash for the bank."

"Reckon it's not wise to do that."

"Why?"

"Too much noise."

"How shall we get at it then?"

"Let two of us go forward and have a look around. Then if they see a way, they can come back for us."

"That's better, I admit, Wood," said Ed Kelly.

Instantly Wood Hite and Clell Miller left the barn. Creeping noiselessly along, they moved toward the bank.

He left Carl Greene going from the strong room in which he had locked the bandits towards the yard at the back of the bank.

He knew that it was necessary for him to proceed with great caution. For the bandits from where they were commanded a view of the rear of the building.

He did not wish them to see him.

For, clever as he was, he would find it difficult to frame a satisfactory story for his leaving the four desperadoes.

He opened the door that gave access to the yard very quietly, closing it after him very carefully.

Crossing the yard he had not so much fear of being seen.

The dangerous point for him was when he came to pass through the high gate that led to the yard.

The detective lay down on the ground.

Then raising his head slightly, he peered long and anxiously through the rails.

Notwithstanding that it was dark, yet he was able to see the bandits.

For the moon was shining brightly.

"I dare not venture," he muttered. "Anyway the bandits are safe," he reasoned, "for Jesse James will find it impossible to get out of where I left him."

The detective looking up, saw that clouds were hurrying along the sky.

In a few minutes they would, for a time, completely obscure the moon.

Then he would run less risk of being seen.

He did not know that Wood Hite and Clell Miller were within a few yards of him.

The two bandits had been watching him very closely.

They were hidden by some plants which grew against the rail on the outside.

But through these plants they had seen the detective cross the yard and come towards the gate.

"That's the cashier," whispered Wood Hite.

"The man who pretends to be him, curse him!" growled Clell Miller.

"That's what I meant."

"Wonder what his game is?"

"Can't make it out; but I guess he's got Jesse and the others shut up."

"Looks like it."

"Hush!"

"Why?"

"He's on the move."

"Gosh! so he is."

The moon was obscured by dark clouds.

The detective unfastened the gate.

Like a serpent he glided through the gate, not troubling to lock it, but only pushing it together.

But he had not moved one step out of the yard when he saw two dark forms by his side.

Instantly two pistols were leveled at his head.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BANDIT KING DEFEATS CARL GREENE.

It says much for the detective's wonderful self-control that he evinced no sign of fear at the perilous position that he now found himself in.

He looked the two bandits in the face.

"Ha, ha," he laughed, "what joke is this, boys? You seem to have Carl Greene on the brain."

The coolness and audacity of his speech completely amazed Ed Kelly and Clell Miller.

So great was their surprise that both of them involuntarily lowered their weapons.

Carl Greene never waited an instant.

He bent low. Then dashed away in the opposite direction to that in which the barn stood.

Bang! Bang.

Both of the bandits fired.

But the shots missed Carl Greene.

He had got some yards away before the weapons had been discharged.

And the darkness concealed him.

Instantly the rest of the bandits, hearing the report of the pistols, rushed out and joined their comrades.

"After him, boys," shouted Ed Kelly excitedly.

"Who?"

"Carl Greene."

This was enough. Immediately the eight men were running hard after the detective.

Carl Greene had not made for the town.

His steps lay in a contrary direction.

He had reason for this. He hoped very soon to throw the bandits off the trail.

Then he intended to double back to the town and get to the sheriff's house.

He was satisfied that the four desperadoes were secure in the room in which he had locked them.

And he did not anticipate any great difficulty in making his escape from the men who were pursuing him.

If it had not have been for something unforeseen he would have had no trouble.

But in the darkness he could not tell exactly where he was going.

The consequence was, that suddenly as he sprang forward, he found that he had jumped into vacancy.

Through the air he went with a rush.

Then he landed with a terrific splash in some water.

The bandits heard the sound.

It put them on their guard. They realized what had happened to the detective.

And they were very careful not to share the same fate.

Cautiously they advanced to the brink of the pit in which the detective had fallen.

Naturally they could see nothing of him.

For the gloom in the hole beneath them was most intense.

Below they could hear Carl Greene struggling in the water.

But they never fired. If they had done so, their shots would have been sent at random.

And it was not wise to make more noise than could be helped. Already they had fired twice. And these shots might be the means of rousing the neighborhood.

"It's no good for all of us to stay here," said Ed Kelly.

"Why not?" answered Wood Hite.

"Wood, there'll be enough to look after Carl Greene."

"Yes, he can't get out."

"The others had better go back to the bank and see if they can give Jesse and the rest of the boys any help."

"Sure."

"Ed Kelly and two of the bandits remained on the edge of the pit, listening to the struggles of Carl Greene in the water below.

They watched most keenly. They were ready to spring on him directly he was visible.

Leaving Carl Greene in the pit, let us see how the four desperadoes in the bank were faring.

After Carl Greene's departure, Bob Ford and Jim Cummins continued to work with the drills on the safe.

They made rapid progress.

The bandit king and Frank James each sat on an iron chest watching the work and smoking cigars.

Neither of the two famous brothers had ever felt in a happier frame of mind.

Within a few feet of them were thousands of dollars.

In a few minutes they would be theirs.

"How much longer, Jim?"

"About five minutes."

"That's good."

The bandit king was impatient. He wanted to handle the bank treasure.

"Wonder where that cuss is?" said Bob Ford.

"Who?"

"The cashier."

"Oh! he won't be long. Guess he's having a look around. This night's work means everything to him."

"Sure."

"Hurry on, boys, have everything ready by the time he returns."

"I'm ready now," said Jim Cummins.

"So'm I," said Bob Ford.

"Have you done enough work to enable the dynamite to finish it?"

"Well, guess we'd do more if we thought that the safe wasn't going to be unlocked for us. But what we've done, Jesse, will be quite enough for our purpose."

"Good."

The bandit king was so impatient now that he couldn't sit still.

He arose from his seat and paced up and down the vault.

"Curse that fellow," he muttered, "why in thunder doesn't he come."

"He's a mighty long time."

"You bet."

"Hope he hasn't got into trouble."

"What d'you mean, Bob?"

"Why, Jesse, it isn't altogether out of the question but what that watchman has got onto his game."

"That's not likely."

"It's possible."

"I'll settle that."

"How?"

"I'll have a look around."

"Be careful. You don't know this building, Jesse, and in the dark you might stumble and make an awful noise."

"Not if I have a light."

The bandit king picked up the lantern which had been on the floor.

He walked over to the door.

Then grasping the handle, he pulled it.

"Heavier than I thought," muttered Jesse James.

He put more strength to his efforts.

But the door never stirred.

The bandit king was astounded.

He bent over and looked closely at the door.

Then he gave a great shout.

"Locked!" he cried.

The other three bandits sprang to their feet.

"What?" they cried.

"The door's locked, boys, there's no getting away from that."

"And we're in a trap."

"That doesn't follow," said the bandit king.

"Looks mighty like it."

"Guess the cashier'll be back to open it. No doubt it closes with a spring, and he didn't know he'd shut us in."

But time passed, and there was no sign of the cashier.

Outside all was still. They did not hear a footstep.

The bandits began to get anxious.

"It looks as though you were right, Bob," said the bandit king.

"Yes, I reckon that watchman has got tight hold of our friend."

"And of us too."

No thought of treachery on the part of the cashier entered the heads of the bandits.

Neither of them doubted him in the least.

But this did not make matters better.

Look at it how they might, they were prisoners in the strong vault of the bank, and they were likely to remain so.

The prospect was appalling.

"Let's take stock of the situation," said Jesse James.

"Why," said Frank James savagely, "you can't make it better. We're here till we're jailed, that's sure."

The bandit king said nothing.

He occupied himself in walking about the vault and sounding the walls, ceiling and floor very carefully.

"It's no good doing that, Jesse," said Jim Cummins. "The cashier told us that the whole place was lined with iron."

"Reckon that watchman will be back with the sheriff in a few minutes."

"You seem anxious to be jailed, Bob," said the bandit king sarcastically.

"Anxious or not, that's where I'm expecting to pass the night."

"By Heaven, no," exclaimed Jesse excitedly. "You never saw me despair."

"Never."

"And you won't now."

His eyes flashed fire, his face was full of courage and determination.

"We drilled holes in the safe," he said, "why not in the door? We can blow open a safe—why not this?"

As he spoke he placed his hand on the heavy iron door that barred the bandit's path to freedom.

The words of the bandit king electrified the others.

"Jesse, you're great," shouted Bob Ford.

"No, but I don't lose my head," answered the bandit king coolly.

Bob Ford and Jim Cummins commenced operations on the door of the vault.

Not a word was spoken.

The strain on the four men was intense. They were working against time.

And they never in their lives exerted themselves so.

The drills made rapid progress.

Several large holes were bored.

"I think, boys, the dynamite will do the rest," said the bandit king.

"Here's the cartridges."

"Right."

Jesse James was about to put them into position preparatory to firing them when a loud noise was heard on the outside.

"Too late," he gasped.

The four men turned deadly pale.

They considered they were lost.

Outside they could hear the cries of several men.

Doubtless they were the sheriff and his deputies who had come to make a capture.

Then came loud knocking at the door of the vault.

The bandits were surprised at this.

They could see no reason for hesitation on the part of the sheriff.

The knocking continued.

"Let's blow open the door and make a rush."

"Great Scott—yes!" cried Jesse James, "that's a good idea, Bob."

Jesse—Jesse!"

"What's that?" cried the bandit king, starting back.

"Some one calling you."

"It's Clell Miller's voice," cried Frank James.

"By Heaven, so it is! They've come to our rescue! Stand back boys!" shouted the bandit king in his loudest tones, "we're going to blow the door open."

The words came faintly, but distinctly through the iron door.

They were followed by a stampede.

Jim Cummins, Bob Ford and Frank James sought refuge behind some high iron chests which lay in the vault.

Jesse James had everything ready.

Then from a distance he exploded the dynamite.

There was an awful roar.

It seemed as though the building itself would fall.

The air was full of debris.

But the bandits were not injured.

They rushed to the door and found that the lock had been destroyed by the explosion.

Instantly they dashed out into the passage outside.

There they found Clell Miller and the other bandits.

"Fly, boys," shouted Clell Miller, "there's not a moment to spare."

In a few seconds the whole party had passed through the back door of the bank which had been burst open.

They crossed the yard and started for their horses as hard as they could go.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BANDITS AND THE DETECTIVES AFTER THE STOLEN TREASURE.

When the bandits reached their cave they found that Ed Kelly and the other two bandits were there.

Then they began to talk about the events of the night.

"Why did you come here Ed," asked Clell Miller.

"Because he escaped out of the pit," answered the bandit, "we thought we'd come back with assistance. We couldn't see anything of you, so we made tracks."

The talk bewildered the bandit king.

"Who's he?" he asked.

"Carl Greene."

"What's he got to do with this business?" added Jesse James.

"Thunder!" cried Clell Miller. "I forgot you didn't know why, Jesse. Carl Greene was the cashier tonight."

The bandit king bounded to his feet.

He was thunderstruck.

When he heard the whole of the story his surprise was increased.

He was dumbfounded.

Carl Greene's audacity was unparalleled, even for him.

The bandit king was furious too, at having proved such an easy dupe.

He sat silent.

"What's that you've got?" shouted Bob Ford.

"A leather case. I picked it up," answered Ed Kelly, on the edge of the pit into which Carl Greene jumped.

"D'you want it?"

"Gosh, no."

"Give it to me then, it'll do to put my bills in when I get them."

Ed Kelly tossed the leather over to Bob Ford.

"Hullo!" cried the latter, "there's money in it already."

"I didn't give you the contents," shouted Ed Kelly.

"Too late now, Ed—you can't go back on your word. Guess I'm a millionaire, at least."

Bob Ford took out a piece of paper which was inside the case.

The rest of the bandits, having nothing to do, were looking at him.

"Well, I guess this isn't worth much," said Bob Ford with a laugh, as he threw the piece of paper on the ground.

It fell at the feet of Jesse James.

The bandit king picked it up.

"Why, there's writing on it," he said.

"What is it?"

"Wait a minute, boys, I'll see."

The bandit king read slowly.

He gave a shout of surprise.

"By Heaven!" he shouted, "this is our best find! Boys, this is a bonanza!"

When the bandits heard what was written on the paper, they were astounded.

"But I reckon the money's all gone by this time. Guess Sam Salter, that's spoken of in the writing is hundreds of miles away now."

"Why?"

"Because, Jesse, that letter was probably written months ago."

"Then you're wrong."

"How's that?"

"Why, I recognize it, look at the shape."

"Great Scott!" cried Frank James, "why it's the same paper we took from the man on the stage."

"Yes, and that Carl Greene afterwards took from me."

"It can't be."

"Why?"

"Because the paper we had was perfectly blank."

"There was as much writing on it then as there is now," said the bandit king.

"How is it then that we didn't see it?" said Bob Ford in a sneering manner.

"Because we were a lot of jays," answered the bandit king, sharply, "the writing was there, but was written in invisible ink. That's all there is to it, boys."

"Gosh, if we'd been smart, we'd seen through that trick."

"Carl Greene did."

"Yes, and he's very likely got the stuff by now."

"Not much!" put in Frank James.

"Why?"

"We've kept him hustling ever since he found the paper, he's had no time."

"He'll be over there now."

"So'll we!" cried Jesse James; "and we'll see who'll win. Somehow, I fancy luck's about to give us a turn."

"Gosh, hope so."

The bandits were soon in the saddle again.

They knew where Parker's Point was and that it was now called Pine Bluff.

They rode along at an easy pace.

"We can't get there tonight, Jesse."

"No, it's forty miles away."

"We might have stayed where we were."

"Guess not. We'll go as far as we can while it's dark. Then we'll hide during the day and commence operations tomorrow as soon as it is dark."

"D'you know the place?"

"Haven't been there, Jim, for fifteen years. That's why I came along now. I want to have a look round during the day."

The bandits found that after they had ridden twenty miles, the day was on the point of breaking.

"It's dangerous to go any farther," said Frank James.

"I think so," said Jesse, "well, this wood will make a fine hiding place."

"That's sure."

The bandits rode several hundred yards into a dense forest.

They dismounted, hitched up their horses, and lay on the ground.

In this manner they passed the day.

That is to say, all of them did with the exception of the bandit king.

Jesse had left the rest about noon.

His intention was to ride to Pine Bluff across the hills.

By doing so, he hoped to reach the place without attracting notice.

Then he would, within a short distance of the spot, leave Siroc somewhere and reconnoiter.

At the very time when the bandit king was thus employed, Carl Greene was also making his way toward Pine Bluff.

The detective had escaped from the pit.

He had eluded the vigilance of Ed Kelly and his two associates. Instantly he had rushed around to the house where the sheriff resided.

He soon roused the official.

The story he had to tell was almost incredible. From anyone else it would have received little credence.

But the sheriff was surprised at nothing that Carl Greene told him.

At once he arose. Then he obtained assistance, and with the detective he hurried to the bank.

The bandits had gone.

The manner of their going was evident.

Carl Greene saw that they had blown open the door.

He cursed himself for his folly in not having acted differently.

Now he saw that it was by the merest chance that the money in the safe had not been taken.

If the bandits had not been badly rattled they would have blown the door of the safe open.

Nothing would have been easier.

The affair caused great excitement and much talk in the small town.

The bandits' trail was not found, so pursuit was useless.

The cashier disappeared. It was discovered that he had robbed the bank of a large sum of money.

Search was made for him, but he was never seen again.

After the termination of the affair, Carl Greene had no reason for remaining in the town.

"I'm due at Pine Bluff," he muttered. "I've wasted enough time already. Henceforth, whatever happens, I'll stick to this business until it is ended."

The detective was in possession of the horse which he had taken from the cashier.

It had enjoyed a prolonged rest.

So when he mounted it he found that it galloped at a great pace.

Hour after hour he went on toward Pine Bluff, though at a much slower gait.

Before starting he had altered his appearance by removing the false black wig and black beard he had worn when he had impersonated the bank cashier.

Naturally he took this precaution.

Though he did not anticipate that he would fall in with any of the bandits.

He knew no reason why they should go to Pine Bluff.

Long ago it was light.

Looking ahead of him, the detective saw a few houses amidst the trees, which grew very thickly.

Then his eye fell on a building which rested on the edge of the precipice.

Evidently it was a dwelling house of some description.

Round this building were high stone walls.

"By Heaven! the very place. That's where that scoundrel Sam Salter lives," exclaimed Carl Greene, "there can't be a doubt of that. There's the wall around the building and certainly this is Pine Bluff."

From the description contained in the letter and from what Black Jake told him he had no doubt that he was right.

"Guess I'll read it again," he said.

He put his hand in his pocket for the leather case.

It was gone.

He searched in every pocket.

There was not a sign of it.

"That's bad, I'm sorry I lost that," he said to himself, "well, he added, after a moment's thought, "it doesn't matter much after all. I've got pretty well the whole of the letter in my head. I'm sure I've made no mistake."

The detective decided to leave his horse where it was.

That is to say he would place it amidst the trees beside the road.

He was even fearful that he had advanced too far already, and that he might have been seen by the inmates of the house.

But the odds, he felt, were all against him.

"That letter must have fell into the water when I fell into the pit," was the thought that passed through his head.

Keeping amid the trees, Carl Greene made his way towards the wall surrounded house until he had got to within one hundred yards of it.

There was nothing to shelter him.

It was too great a risk to run.

Carl Greene was very anxious to thoroughly examine the surroundings of the house.

But he felt that the man who lived there would certainly see him.

There was nothing in Carl Greene's appearance to excite suspicion.

He looked like an ordinary farmer.

But Sam Salter would know that he was not a resident of that place.

The very fact that he was a stranger would alarm the crook.

These considerations induced Carl Greene to resolve that he would stay in the wood until it was dark.

He saw two huts some distance from it.

When it was quite dark, Carl Greene emerged from his retreat.

He felt convinced that he would not be recognized.

He was wearing a sombrero hat, and high riding boots, with a pistol belt around his waist.

He had on a heavy false mustache and a wig formed of long, flowing black hair, which hung down on his shoulders.

"They may take me for a bandit," laughed Carl Greene, "but I guess they won't take me for a detective."

He left his horse in the wood.

Then he went along the road until he came to the first of the two houses he had seen.

It was a very small wooden shanty.

He saw a light burning in it.

Rap—rap!

The detective knocked at the door without hesitation.

Evidently the inmate was not easily alarmed.

He doubtless thought that he was too poor to be robbed.

Without asking who the visitor was, he opened the door.

Carelessly he glanced at the detective.

"Come in," he said.

"Guess I won't do that," answered Carl Greene. "I only want a drink of water, for I'm mighty thirsty."

"Water's not a man's drink, mister. Step in and try my corn juice."

"You're kind. Guess I won't wait to be asked thrice."

The occupant of the hut shut the door, then he produced the whisky and some glasses.

"Help yerself, mister."

"Sure."

Carl Greene took a drink.

"I'm darned glad to see you."

"How is that?" asked the detective.

"Why it's thunderin' lonely in these parts. Reckon yer the only visitor I've come across in months."

"But you've got neighbors?"

"Yes, one."

"You mean in the other hut?"

"Yes."

"But how about the big house?"

"What, with the wall round et?"

"Yes."

"Gosh! I never set eyes on him. Reckon there is a cuss livin' thar, but he keeps himself close."

"But he must go out."

"I never saw him."

"How does he live? He's bound to have food."

"That's right enough. But I tell you I've never seen him. Ef he leaves the house it must be at night."

"He must be crazy?"

"Can't say."

Carl Greene found that no information of any value was to be obtained from his host.

So very shortly he said good night.

"I've not found out much, except that he doesn't go out in the day," muttered the detective; "it's evident from that that night's the time for me to work. He must be out then. If not tonight, some other. I'll watch till he shows up."

With this idea in his head the detective made an almost complete circuit of the wall that surrounded the building.

By so doing he was able to reach a wood that lay at the back of the house.

The trees grew almost up to the wall, and consequently he knew he would have more chance of being unnoticed.

Emerging from the shade of the trees, he found himself within two or three yards of the wall.

Under the shadow of it Carl Greene remained for some few minutes, not having quite made up his mind how he would act.

He found that the wall was considerably higher than himself.

But he noticed at the corner some rising ground that would enable him to reach it without much difficulty.

Instantly he listened.

For the detective thought it quite likely that although the man would not show himself outside the precincts of the house, yet he might be in the yard that surrounded it.

But he could not hear a sound.

Carl Greene got tired of remaining idle.

He resolved to act.

"I'll take a look round," he said to himself.

"I may discover something."

With these views upon his mind he moved along until he was within a yard or two of the corner.

"What ever happens," said the detective inwardly, "I am safe from view from outside."

Habit, however, caused him to glance around in every direction.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DETECTIVE HOLDS UP SAM SALTER.

The detective thought it advisable to make some enquiries about the man who lived in the building he wished to visit.

He was now ready to act.

Springing up, with his hands he caught the parapet of the wall. To it he clung.

Then, as noiselessly as was possible, he dragged himself up the wall until he found himself on top of it.

Then the detective lay close down.

He looked around carefully.

The darkness effectually prevented him from seeing objects distinctly.

But as far as he could make out the house was surrounded by a garden in which many trees and bushes grew.

Having ventured so far, Carl Greene was the wrong kind of man to remain satisfied with what he had seen.

He immediately made up his mind that he would inspect the house at a closer range.

"I'll drop over," he said, "for it's perfectly safe. It's easy to hide behind some of those trees if any one shows up."

But scarcely had he made this resolve when he was startled.

He heard a noise in the garden.

"Footsteps!" he gasped.

He was right; it was evident from the sound that a man was approaching.

Slowly he came along, cracking the dry twigs with his feet as he did so.

Carl Greene remained as still as death.

The man came within a few yards of him, looking at the ground as he went along.

Suddenly he raised himself on the wall.

Covering the man in the garden with his six-shooter, Carl Green cried, "Halt! or I'll fire."

Bob Ford and Ed Kelly who were coming around the corner stopped spellbound.

The two bandits remained quite motionless.

Then to their intense surprise, they saw the man on the wall drop over into the garden.

Bob Ford seized Ed Kelly's hand.

He walked cautiously away, taking his companion with him.

When they were some distance from the place the two men stopped.

"What's to be done?"

"Get back at once."

"And tell Jesse about it?"

"Yes."

"Right."

The two men never halted until they reached the place where the rest of the men were hiding.

Jesse James had altered his mind. He had decided not to visit the village during the day.

So he waited until his comrades came up.

Then he remained with them in the very same wood in which Carl Green had taken shelter, although it was a different part of it.

As soon as it was advisable, Ed Kelly and Bob Ford had gone out to act as spies for the purpose of inspecting the house and its surroundings.

They found the bandits where they had left them.

"Soon back, boys."

"Yes, Jesse."

"Found out all you wanted to know, Ed?"

"More."

"More! How's that?"

"The fellow in the house inside the walls has got company tonight."

"Gosh! I'd rather he was alone!" shouted Frank James.

"You must have been mighty close to have seen that, boys. Guess you got right up to the house."

"Didn't look over the wall," said Ed Kelly.

"But we saw enough."

"Well, out with it," cried the bandit king, impatiently. "Guess I don't like to hear the news in bits."

"Well, Jesse, Ed and I went down right close to the wall. You bet we moved pretty quiet."

"Sure."

"We had no sooner turned a corner of the wall than we saw something which astounded us."

"What was it?"

"A man lying half over over the wall, right on top of it."

"Why didn't you shoot him?" exclaimed Jim Cummins.

"That's what you ought to have done."

"Well, we didn't," replied Bob Ford. "I thought it was better not."

"Gosh, Bob, we may not get such a chance again of killing Sam Salter."

"It wasn't Sam Salter."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

"Who was it then?"

"Carl Greene!"

The bandit king was furious at this information. Of course he had expected that the detective would be on hand.

But none the less he was annoyed at him getting the start of the bandits.

"Go on with your tale, Bob. What happened after?"

"To cut it short, Jesse, he covered a man in the garden with his six-shooter, then he sprang off the wall."

"Great Heaven! this is awful news," exclaimed Jesse James excitedly. "The man in the garden must have been Sam Salter."

"That's sure."

"And Carl Greene's held him up and made him surrender all his dollars."

"He's not had time."

"There's not a moment to lose."

"You be there isn't. If we're not slick we'll get left over this deal," added Frank James.

"But what's to be done?"

"Why, we must go down to the place and guard all the walls. Don't give Carl Greene a chance to get away."

"It's our only hope."

"Yes, and we may be able—some of us—to scale the walls and get into the house without being seen."

"We'll try,"

The prize at stake was too great to allow of any trifling.

The bandits had made up their minds that the dollars should not escape them.

There was now little occasion to observe secrecy in their advance toward the building.

For the only man whom they had feared to meet had obtained access to it.

The two or three people who lived in the place were all in bed.

All we've got to do, boys," said the bandit king, "is to take care that he doesn't hear us."

"Yes; then we'll give him a surprise."

The bandits went down to the wall-encircled building.

Noiselessly they surrounded it.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CROOK GETS THE BETTER OF THE DETECTIVE.

When Carl Green sprang off the wall into the garden, he was very careful to keep his opponent covered with his six-shooter as he did so.

The man was taken by surprise.

The detective was within a few feet of him holding a pistol at his head.

"Move on!" said Carl Greene.

The other man seemed rooted to the ground.

For he never stirred.

"Didn't you hear me speak?" said the detective, sternly.

The crook was recovering himself.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"To go into the house."

"Why?"

"I want to talk to you. I prefer to speak there."

"I'm at your mercy, so I suppose I'll have to do it."

"You reason well. Move on."

The crook turned and went toward the house.

"Not so fast, not so fast," exclaimed the detective, "this pistol of mine has a habit of going off, and I'm sure it will if you're not careful."

These remarks checked the crook.

The two men arrived at the entrance to the house. Carl Green being about a yard in the rear of the other man.

From the cursory glance that the detective made, he saw that the house was larger than he had imagined.

But he had no time to make careful observation, for the door was open and he had to enter after the crook.

The latter led the way into a small room lit by a lamp.

This room was evidently the abode of the crook.

It contained a small cooking stove, a folding bed, a table and two chairs and was probably the only room in the house that had any chairs in it.

The first thing that Carl Greene did was to take from the crook a pistol that he carried.

Then he searched him to see that he had no weapons concealed on his person.

"Sit down," said the detective.

The crook obeyed.

Carl Greene sat at a small table a few feet away from the occupant of the house, and with a six-shooter in his hand, ready to fire at a moment's notice.

By the aid of the lamp light he was able to see the kind of man he had to deal with.

The crook was of middle height, wearing a beard of apparently four or five week's growth.

His face was pale, probably through enforced confinement.

His keen, deep-set eyes, sparkled as diamonds as they moved to and fro.

Evidently he was very nervous.

For his fingers twitched.

"Sam Salter," said Carl Greene, abruptly.

The crook took no notice.

"Didn't you hear me speak?" asked the detective in a severe tone.

"Yes."

"Why didn't you answer?"

"You didn't speak to me."

"Ho, ho," said Carl Greene with a chuckle. "So that's the line your going to adopt, is it?"

"You should call me by my right name."

"That's not easy; a man like you has so many. But just now Sam Salter's good enough for me, and I'll continue to address you by that term."

The crook said nothing.

He was wondering who the stranger was.

He judged him to be a robber, and it would be a difficult matter to escape from the clutches of the desperado.

"I know all about you, Mr. Salter," said Carl Greene.

"Then you won't want to ask me anything," sneered the crook.

"On the contrary, it is to ask you a few questions that I have paid you a visit," retorted the detective.

"You were kind."

"Yes, I admit," answered Carl Greene with a smile on his face. "Listen."

"It would be rude not to do so."

The crook spoke in an easy manner which it seemed nothing could disturb.

"I want to know where you put the hundred thousand dollars you took from the men who helped you steal them?"

The crook was not proof against this.

His surprise was apparent.

The nervous twitching of his hands increased, so did the pallor of his face.

His eyes were brighter than ever, as though he had a fever.

"That scares you a bit, Mr. Salter," laughed the detective. "I want your answer, and I want the money."

The crook braced himself up.

"I don't understand you," he said.

"I expected you to say that."

"It's the truth."

"Yes, when lies are the truth," answered Carl Greene. "Take notice of what I'm going to say."

"Go on."

"I didn't come here for amusement."

"You came here to rob me," said the crook coolly, "if you found anything of value here."

"I didn't come here to rob you of one cent," said Carl Greene, looking the man straight in the face.

"Then I've done you an injustice."

"I came here," continued Carl Greene without taking any notice of the other man's remark, "to restore the money you have in your possession of its rightful owner, the bank where it belongs."

"And who in thunder are you," shouted the crook, "to talk this way of making restitution?"

"I am Carl Greene, the detective."

The crook collapsed.

Throwing up his hands with a gesture of despair, he sank in the chair in which he was sitting.

"So you see," said Carl Greene, "I shall not only recover the money, but I shall arrest you."

The crook recovered himself.

He looked Carl Greene straight in the eye.

"Mister," he said.

"Well?"

"I've got a proposition to make."

"Go on."

"Can't this matter be squared?"

"I don't understand you."

"I'll speak plainer. How much will you take to leave me and go about your business?"

"If you offered me every dollar you've got, you wouldn't buy me."

"Quite incorruptible," sneered the crook.

"Quite."

The detective had made up his mind how to act.

He decided not to question the crook any further at present.

"I'll just take a look around the house," said the detective to himself. "Maybe I'll find the stuff."

But in order to do this, he saw that it was absolutely necessary to secure the crook, so that he would have no chance of making his escape.

He had little difficulty in seeing how this could be done.

There was a small closet in the room.

The door of it was open.

Carl Greene saw that it was quite large enough for his purpose.

"You'll have to go in there," he said.

"Eh?"

"You heard me. Get up and skip in."

The crook protested.

But it was no good. He was compelled to submit.

Carl Greene placed him in the closet; then he locked the door and securely fastened it, putting the key in his pocket.

Taking the lamp from the table, the detective walked out of the room.

His intention was to make a complete examination of the building.

He decided to commence at the basement.

The house covered a large space.

Therefore it took him some time to go through the rooms.

He carefully examined them all.

Naturally he expected to find that there was a cellar beneath some of the rooms, and he anticipated that the treasure would be found hidden in this vault.

But search how he could, he could find nothing of this kind.

Abandoning the scrutiny in despair, he proceeded to the floor above.

Here there were three rooms.

All of them were empty.

There was not one single article of furniture to be seen.

"I'm only wasting time," thought Carl Greene, "guess I'll go back and finish this business. I reckon I'll frighten this fellow into making a confession."

The detective was determined that he would succeed.

So with these thoughts in his head he hurried back to the room in which he left the crook.

"Now, mister," he cried, "I've come to release you!"

With these words he placed the lamp on the table.

Then as he looked up he saw something which startled him.

It was a face at the window.

And the face was that of Jesse James.

Carl Greene never moved.

From his manner it was impossible for any one to have known that he had received a surprise.

He did not utter an exclamation.

But he sat down quite coolly in one of the chairs that stood near the table.

And he took good care that the one he selected would be out of range of the bandit king's six-shooter.

Notwithstanding this apparent calm, the detective fully realized his danger.

"Jesse James," he gasped, "and that's not all, for it's dead sure that he's got all his band with him."

The bandit king's face had only been visible for a moment.

But it was enough.

Carl Greene knew it too well. There was no room for mistake. It seemed now, that instead of capturing the crook, he would have to fight for his own life.

The detective could not conceive how it was that the bandits had come to the house.

"They can't have tracked me here," he said inwardly.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed a few minutes later, "I see it now, they found that letter I dropped."

This being so, he knew that there was no chance of their leaving.

"He saw me right enough," said the detective to himself, "and if I wasn't here they'd make a bold effort to get the money."

Look at it how he might, it was evident to Carl Greene that his position was desperate.

"If I only knew of a way out," he muttered.

"There must be some passage out of this place where no one can see you."

But he realized that he had little chance of finding it.

Then an idea came into his head.

It was to make terms with the crook.

He hated to do so.

But it seemed better than to fall into the hands of the bandits.

The more he thought, the more it came home to him that the only way he could save himself was by the aid of the crook.
 "I'll do it," he cried. "He'll jump at the chance!"
 Instantly he rose from his feet.
 He went to the closet and opened the door.
 Then he started back absolutely amazed.
 The closet was empty.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BANDITS CAPTURE THE CROOK.

The bandit king, Bob Ford and Frank James had scaled the walls.

The rest of the bandits remained outside.

Cautiously toward the house moved the three men.

They had advanced in different directions.

For they thought it possible that Carl Greene might hear them and attempt to escape.

This they wished to prevent.

The bandit king heard none of the talk that took place between Carl Greene and Sam Salter.

He had arrived at the window whilst the detective was engaged in searching the house.

When he was looking in Carl Greene returned.

"He saw me right enough," said the bandit king as he sprang back.

Carl Greene's coolness did not deceive Jesse James.

He had had too much experience with the detective to believe in appearances.

Jesse James was jubilant.

It seemed to him that the detective could not possibly escape.

When Carl Greene was sitting at the table the bandit king saw him.

The detective thought he had withdrawn out of sight of Jesse James.

But it was not so.

Although his head was not visible, yet his feet and legs were.

The question now was how to effect a capture.

With Carl Greene out of the way the task of the bandits would be easy.

Single handed the crook must submit. Then the dollars that he had with him would fall into the hands of the bandits.

"It's a regular bonanza," said Jesse James, "we've never had such luck."

Whilst he was considering how he should act, he saw Carl Greene go to the closet in the room.

Then he saw him unlock and open the door.

The detective could not restrain an exhibition of surprise when he found that the place was empty.

At once the truth came to the bandit king.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "he's locked the crook up in there and he's escaped."

Now, this discovery did not please Jesse.

"Oh, Bob?"

"Yes."

The bandit king joined his comrade.

"I've seen him."

"Who?"

"Carl Greene."

"Where?"

"In the house. In the room with the light."

"Did he see you?"

"He pretended he didn't, but I know better."

"He'll try and escape, Jesse."

"Yes, but what's worse, Bob, that crook may get away, then we're done. We may kill Carl Greene, but we'll lose the money for sure!"

"Hasn't Carl Greene got hold of him?"

"No."

Jesse related what he had seen.

Bob Ford agreed with his view of the case. Evidently the crook had got the better of the detective.

"Think he's in the house?"

"Couldn't say, Bob, but it seems to me that this house is mighty strange. Why how in thunder could he get out of that closet? There's a wall at the back."

"Guess the place is full of secret passages and trap doors."

"Shouldn't wonder. Where's Frank?"

"Round the corner."

Jesse hurried round to his brother and told him everything.

"Be on your guard, Frank, he must not escape us."

"By Heaven, no."

The three bandits made no attempt to enter the house. They contented themselves with watching for the appearance of Sam Salter.

But they saw nothing of him.

Whilst they were watching the house, Ed Kelly came up.

"What is it, Ed?"

"Great news!"

"Out with it."

"We've captured Sam Salter!"

"Where?"

"He's outside the wall."

"Gosh! did he climb over?"

"No."

"He couldn't have passed us."

"He didn't. We saw him emerging from a hole in the ground."

"I was right," said Bob Ford, "I reckon there's many ways out of this place."

Jesse James was delighted.

"Stay there, Ed," he said. "I'll go and visit the prisoner. Look sharp after Carl Greene."

"Right."

The bandit king hurried away. He felt confident that the detective could not elude the vigilance of the three bandits.

On reaching the wall Jesse James came to a group of men.

In their midst he saw the crook.

He was held fast in the clasp of Clell Miller and Jim Cummins.

"What do you think of this, Jesse?" asked the latter.

"Think! Why it's great!"

The bandits were wildly excited.

Jesse James had great difficulty in keeping them quiet. He was afraid that their voices would reach Carl Greene and allow him to see through the present state of affairs.

This would never do.

He wished the detective to think that the crook was still in the house.

"Stand him in the middle, boys," cried the bandit king, "I want to talk to him."

Jesse lit a cigar and sat down.

The crook, crazy with fear, stood a trembling object in the ring of bandits, each of whom, with a pistol in hand, was ready to drop him if he attempted to get away.

"D'you know who we are?" demanded the bandit king, sternly.

The crook was too scared to reply.

"Well, I'll tell you. I'm Jesse James and those are the James Boys."

A cry of despair came from the lips of the crook as he heard pronounced the name of the most dreaded desperadoes in the world.

"Now, you know what to expect," laughed Jim Cummins.

"Guess you know why we're here?"

The crook felt it was necessary to maintain his coolness.

He nerved himself with an effort.

"I do not."

"Can't you guess?"

"Well, I thought it possible that you might be after Carl Greene, who's in the house."

"Yes, that is possible," said the bandit king, sarcastically, "and it's even more possible that we may be after the dollars you have, somewhere near a hundred thousand."

The crook was so surprised that he forgot his fears.

How in the world did Carl Greene and the bandits both discover his secret.

"The gentleman's puzzled, Jesse."

"I see."

"Let him read the letter."

"Gosh! so he shall."

The bandit king took the paper from his pocket.

"Read that," said Jesse James, "it'll show that we know everything and save a lot of talk."

Jim Cummins produced a lantern. He flashed it on the paper.

The crook meanwhile was turning the matter over in his head that of one of his former comrades whom he had deceived.

He glanced at the letter in places. He read enough to see that the writer was well informed.

"Yes, I read it," he said, "and I am more puzzled than ever. The man who wrote it must have been dreaming."

"You don't say."

"I'm quite a poor man."

"We know."

"It is the truth."

"Better shoot him, boys," said the bandit king, coolly looking around the ring.

"Sure."

"A man who spends a hundred thousand dollars in a few weeks isn't fit to live," said Jim Cummins.

The bandits laughed heartily.

The crook meanwhile was turning the matter over in his mind.

He realized that he had no chance of escape, and he also saw that although he had fallen in with the bandits, he was better off than if he had remained in the house.

For they would only rob him.

Carl Greene would take him to jail.

He resolved to come to terms with these desperate men if possible.

"Mister," he said, addressing the bandit king.

"Yes."

"You seem to be somewhat on the same line as ourselves."

"That's so."

"I'm surprised at your wanting to rob me. Thieves don't generally prey upon thieves."

"And we don't often," answered Jesse James.

"But you forfeited all claims upon us by the way you treated the man who helped you gain the money."

This was, in the eyes of the bandits, an unpardonable offence.

Guilty as they were of the most heinous crimes against the world, yet they had always remained strictly honest to each other.

The crook would say nothing.

He knew the bandit king was right.

"We won't discuss that," he said. "Now, I don't mind admitting that I can put my hands upon a few dollars."

"A few!"

"Well, some thousands."

"Now you're talking."

"How much d'you want?"

"It's not for me to say. Make your offer to us."

"Will ten thousand suit?"

"Not near it."

"You'll take all I've got."

"And leave you to starve," laughed the bandit king. "We're hard hearted villains."

The bandits roared.

"Hush, boys, Carl Greene mustn't overhear us."

The name of the detective caused the crook to shudder with fright.

He decided to accept any terms that these men might agree to.

"How about twenty thousand?"

"Say fifty, and it's a deal."

"Fifty thousand," gasped the man.

"Yes."

The crook knew that he would have forty thousand dollars left after handing over the sum to the bandits.

"I agree," he said, "on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you let me go free."

"Granted."

"And kill Carl Greene if possible."

The bandits laughed.

"There's no necessity to stipulate that," cried Jesse.

"Fifty thousand dollars."

It was a vast sum. The bandits were eager to handle it.

"Mister!"

"Yes," said the crook.

"We must get into the house, for the money's there, I reckon."

"That is so. I determined to leave it and come back at some future time, for I was satisfied that Carl Greene would never find it."

"How shall we enter?"

"By the secret passage, by which I tried to escape."

"Then lead on, I want to get through and go."

The crook entered the subterranean passage.

Jesse James was near him.

Jim Cummins, carrying a lantern, was close at hand.

The rest of the bandits followed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONCLUSION.

After Carl Greene had discovered the flight of the crook, he remained motionless for some time.

He knew not how to act.

This incident had upset all his calculations.

Recovering himself, he came to a decision.

"My greatest peril," he said to himself, "is from the bandits, so I'd better look out after them first."

At once he went to the door of the house and ascertained that it was bolted.

He took the precaution of placing an iron bar across it.

So far as this entrance was concerned, he now felt secure.

Then to his gratification, on going through the house, he discovered that all the windows were defended on the inside with heavy iron bars which made an entrance impossible.

"A regular fortress," he laughed, "well, the garrison 'll do the best it can to defend itself."

Satisfied that the bandits could not enter the building, he next turned his attention to the crook.

"He must be hiding somewhere," he muttered; "guess he can't hurt me though, for I've got my six-shooter and he's unarmed."

He went to the closet again.

Instantly he discovered the manner in which Sam Salter made his escape.

The wood at the back was a door that opened into an adjoining room.

It was an extremely simple contrivance.

"Great Scott!" said Carl Greene, "how he must have laughed at the famous detective being fooled in this way."

A search round the house revealed nothing of the missing man.

"Anyway, I'm in possession," murmured Carl Greene, "and that's a good deal."

Not disturbed by the black outlook, Carl Greene took a chair out into the passage adjoining the front door.

He also took the lamp with him.

Sitting down, he thought that he had chosen a safe spot.

"No bullets can reach me here," he reasoned.

Busily he turned the extraordinary events of the night over in his mind.

Since he had sat there some time had passed.

Suddenly he started.

For he heard a strange sound.

His hearing was keen.

Instantly he was on the alert.

Still as death he sat.

"By Heaven!" he exclaimed, "it's beneath me."

The discovery startled him.

He listened intently.

The sounds were nearer, but still very faint.

"What can it mean," he gasped, "it must be the crook returning."

The thought that this was so put the detective into a better frame of mind.

"He thinks to surprise me," he said to himself. "There must be a secret passage. Well, I will furnish the surprise instead."

With these words he moved noiselessly behind a high wooden chest which stood in the passage, about eighteen inches from the wall.

Carl Greene's plan was to allow the crook to appear.

Then he would spring on him and effect a capture.

It seemed an apparently easy matter to carry out this programme.

But as the detective listened, sounds came to him that disturbed him.

For he heard several voices.

"Great Heaven! the bandits," he gasped. "I am lost!"

As he pronounced these words he saw a portion of the floor move.

What was no doubt a trap door, was lifted up slightly.

Through the aperture came the noise of many men.

Carl Greene did not hesitate a minute.

He took one terrific leap.

Then with all his force he lighted on the slowly moving trap door.

His weight caused it to close with a bang.

There was a cry of rage from beneath, and a loud noise.

Carl Greene laughed savagely.

"I hope I've smashed the scoundrel's head," he said.

Instantly he stooped down.

He thought he could see some means of fastening the trap door.

To his horror he found that it could not be done.

The detective saw now how desperate his position was.

He had his weight only to rely on.

Could he maintain his place? Time would tell.

He could hear the men below talking.

"Curse him!" growled Jesse James, "it's a piece of darned bad luck he should have been there."

"He nearly broke my skull," said the crook savagely.

"You'll pay him out with interest, mister," remarked Jim Cummins.

"Yes, if you can't get in."

"We must," said the bandit king.

"There's no difficulty if we all set to work," said Clall Miller. Is there a fastening?"

"No."

"Then he's got no chance."

"Now, all together, boys."

"Right!"

As many of the bandits as could get their shoulders to the trap door did so.

Jesse James gave the word.

The force they applied was irresistible.

The trap door shot up violently.

Carl Greene went with it.

He was hurled with great force against the chair upon which he had been sitting.

The chair rolled over.

It smashed the lamp.

Then all was total darkness.

Bang! Bang!

Quick as lightning, Carl Greene drew his six-shooter and fired at the spot where he thought the trap door was.

"Throw on the light, Jim. Kill him! kill him!"

It was the bandit king's voice.

Carl Greene thought he knew where the stairs were that led to the upper floor.

He rushed toward them.

A stream of light swept across the passage.

Bang! bang!

Two bullets whistled past the detective.

But like the shots fired by him, they did no harm.

Up the stairs he flew, getting out of the reach of the missiles.

A crowd of men sprang out of the subterranean passage.

They bounded madly after Carl Greene.

As the leader of them reached the corridor above, he heard a door close.

Carl Greene had obtained shelter in one of the rooms and had instantly locked the door behind him.

Jesse James came up.

"Where is he?" he shouted.

"In there."

Tell Miller pointed to the room in which Carl Green was hidden.

The bandits in a body threw themselves on the door.

They did so with terrific force.

But they could not break into the room.

"Take care he doesn't escape."

"Now, Jim?"

"Through the window."

"We'll settle that game."

The bandit king rushed into another room, the door of which was open.

He threw up the window.

"Bang!" he shouted.

"Who is it?"

"Jesse, I'm up here."

"Well?"

"Carl Greene's in the next room to this. He can't come out. Take care he doesn't escape by the window."

"Sure."

The detective had heard every word of this talk.

"They've got me now," he said to himself, "escape's impossible. But they haven't got the money, and they'll have no better luck searching for it than I had."

This was the only grain of comfort he found in the situation.

"It's no good waiting here, Jesse."

Carl Greene listened to the talk.

"Why?"

"He can't escape."

"No, that's sure."

"Well, hadn't we better look after the money? Let's get that. Then we'll deal with Carl Greene."

"By Heaven—yes, Jim!" answered the bandit king. "I want to handle those dollars. What d'you say, mister?"

"I agree with your friend. Let's get the money at once."

Carl Greene started.

"The crook!" he exclaimed. "By Heaven! I am in hard luck! These scoundrels have beaten me this time."

"Well, come on, boys."

"Not all?"

"No, leave three there to manage Carl Greene, that'll be enough, won't it?"

"Great Scott, yes," laughed Wood Hite.

"Very well."

The bandit king, the crook, and some of the others went down stairs.

Directly they had gone, Carl Greene struck a match he had in his pocket. By its light he saw there was a closet in the room.

He ran toward it.

Opening the door, he inspected it carefully.

Then he found to his delight that it was constructed in the same way as the closet down stairs from which the crook had escaped.

Again a feeling of hope came over the detective.

"I got thirteen men against me," he cried, "but I won't despair yet."

The secret door in the closet opened easily.

Carl Greene passed through it into the adjoining room.

He found that the door of this room opening into the corridor did so at the top of the stairs.

"I can creep down, I think," he said to himself.

The bandits were at the other end of the corridor near the door of the room in which he imagined the detective to be.

The darkness prevented them from seeing him, and they were too far off to hear him.

Down the stairs he passed noiselessly.

Already he had made up his mind how to act.

It was clearly impossible for him to fight all these men and take the money from them.

He crept to the front door of the house.

Making no noise, he removed the iron bar he had placed across it.

Then he gradually slid the bolt back.

Cautiously he opened the door and slipped out into the darkness.

The bandits with the assistance of the crook were not occupied long in finding the treasure.

They received their share of it.

"Now for Carl Greene," said Jesse James.

Up stairs rushed the men.

By making one concerted effort, they forced open the door of the room in which Carl Greene had taken refuge.

The lantern showed it was empty.

A look at the closet showed how the escape had been made.

Furious with rage, the bandits dashed down below.

The open door indicated that Carl Greene had gone.

"He's escaped!"

"Yes, but we've got the money, boys. It's a bonanza. We must make tracks or Carl Greene and the sheriff'll be after us."

Instantly the bandits and the crook left the house.

Carl Greene followed out his plan.

He waited near the house.

Then he got on the trail of the bandits and resolved that they should not escape him.

But owing to the darkness he lost them completely.

The bandits divided their spoil.

Then they separated and went to various places at a great distance to enjoy their fortunately acquired wealth.

It was a long time before Carl Greene forgot his hard luck.

[THE END.]

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